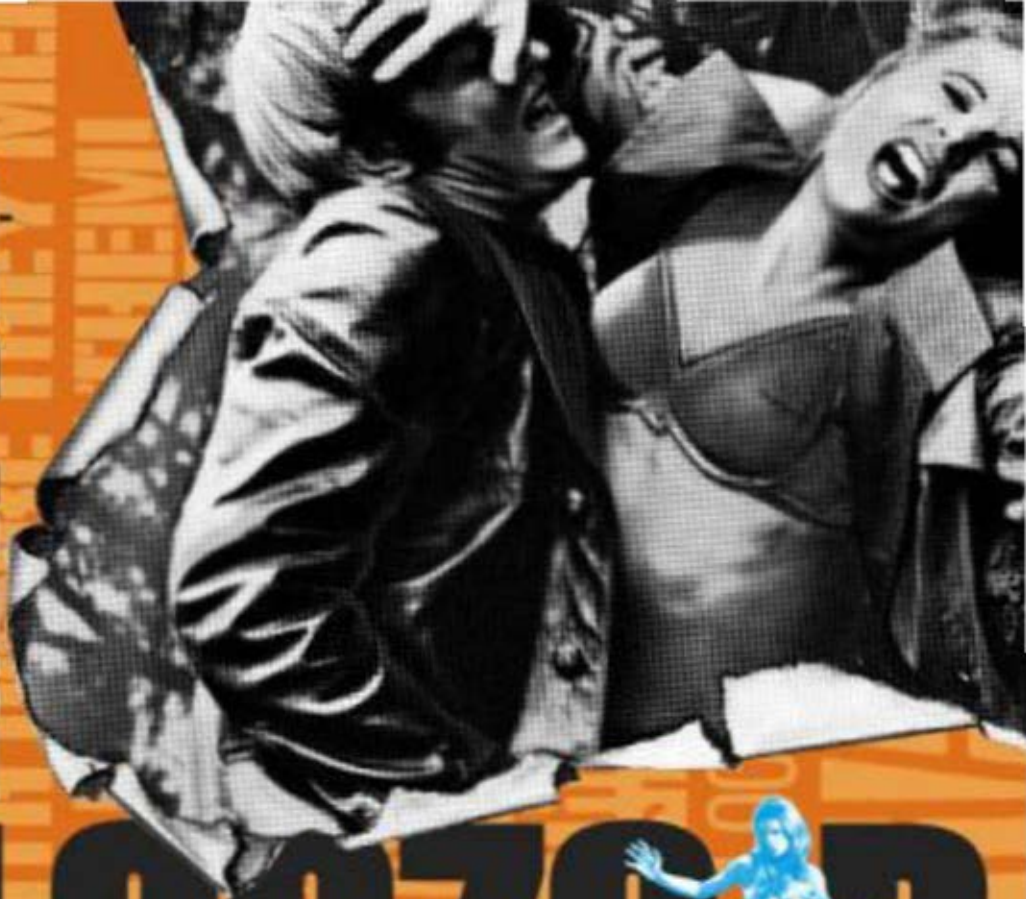
A mind-twisting tour through the grindhouse cinema of times square!



# Sleazoid Express

BILL LANDIS AND MICHELLE CLIFFORD

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## For Bill

Thanks for being a great writing partner. I wanted to write with you since I first set eyes on you. To quote the song "Sara" by Fleetwood Mac, "I think I had met my match . . ." Here we are sixteen years later.

In homage to your sexy genius, let me spin some tunes of tribute. The velour "Juicy" by M'Tume and a raunchy wedding song, "Live with Me" by the Stones. For my hardworking *Sleazoid* loverman and scholar.

–MC

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Love always, Bill

To
Victoria Sabine Landis,
with love

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# Preface

**For as long as I can remember, I've been obsessed with exploitation movies** in particular and Times Square in general. Throughout the 1960s, I'd see lurid ad mats in the *New York Post* with screaming headlines like, "The weirder it was, the more they enjoyed it." That sounded good to me. Movies like *Kiss Me, Kiss Me, Kiss Me; Gutter Trash;* and *The Curse of Her Flesh* all promised a world far away from the pale, sterile sexuality of the usual Hollywood fare. Around this time, the MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America) was debating whether Elizabeth Taylor could use four-letter words in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* The new ratings system incensed me, and I was all ready with a fake ID early on. The MPAA's pesky bunch of killjoy authoritative office workers and Jesuit priests weren't gonna keep me from seeing *99 Women* and *Succubus.* No way.

An air force brat, I was born in France and raised partly in Europe. I first set eyes on the Deuce—the strip on 42nd Street between 7th and 8th Avenues—when I returned to the United States from England. The Deuce was in its full-blown 1960s sexual glory, and some of the hustlers were still sporting the *Midnight Cowboy* style. They looked delusional, but the street looked just like I wanted it to. It was its own art, its own world within itself. The streets were lit by blazing neon. The marquees outside the theaters formed an umbrella over the sidewalk. They were even more visually striking than the theater marquees I knew from Piccadilly. On the Deuce, each theater had its own personality.

Since my parents enjoyed Broadway theater, I got to go to the neighborhood a lot. Looking back on those times, the shows weren't *all* boring. When we saw *Coco,* starring Katherine Hepburn, some starstruck retiree tourist took a snapshot. Kate in turn took a fit, mumbled curses at the audience, and fled offstage. The audience was left to suffer for twenty minutes until Kate felt like going back to work. At a young age, I learned that Times Square was a place where people often lost their composure and took haughty attitudes.

On other forays to tourist trap plays during the 1970s, I became fixated on

the marquees, theaters, and what they were showing. The Rialto was premiering *The Devil in Miss Jones* and the theater entrance was emblazoned with a mural of an orgy. I found myself wanting to run away and dive right into the *Miss Jones* mural, which to my way of thinking represented everything free and wild.

In the summer of 1975, I turned sixteen, graduated early from high school, and was soon enrolled in a joint BS-MBA program at New York University, which I attended through 1980, reading the books and passing the tests, but mostly skipping the classes. Instead, I got my real education from the exploitation movies on the Deuce. I had a perpetual contest with myself to see how many double and triple features I could catch in a week. The unique atmosphere of the grindhouses fascinated me. The audiences would talk back to the characters on screen in an ongoing call-and-response rhythm. The unkept fixtures, double balconies, and massive screens made the theaters the best places to see a film. The bigger the screen, the better.





Spending time in those theaters, I grew increasingly irritated by the offhand putdowns and snide comments of cinema snobs like the *New Yorker*'s Pauline Kael and *The New York Times*'s Vincent Canby, who implied that Times Square movies could only entertain low-IQ types, and seemed unable to praise anything beyond the hip new Fellini or Bergman film. I, on the other hand, felt their "old masters" were directors who hadn't shown a new wrinkle in years. To me, 42nd Street was where the *real* aesthetic innovations were being made. There was no permanent record of the type of exploitation films I had so relentlessly attended. So in June 1980, I started *Sleazoid Express.*

I typed the first *Sleazoid* on a borrowed manual typewriter in my room at the George Washington Hotel on 23rd Street and Lex, a popular spot for visiting musicians and student tours. It was $100 a week for a bright if small room with maid service; it was only a twenty-minute walk to the Deuce or a three-stop subway ride on the N or R subway line. The early editions of *Sleazoid* were offset printed and self-distributed every two weeks. The only subscription price was the cost of mailing. Hundreds of copies were given away free at book and record stores, after-hours clubs, bohemian parties, an *Artforum* magazine event at the old Hellfire Club, and performance art spaces. They even popped up at "The Times Square Show," where a bunch of Lower East Side artists and scene makers like Kenny

Scharf, Beth and Scott B, and Keith Haring took over a building on 41st and Broadway and showed their raunchiest projects.

*Sleazoid Express* led me to a regular gig at *Soho Weekly News,* where I reviewed exploitation films. In addition, I began tracking down and interviewing exploitation directors for magazines like *Fangoria* and *Film Comment.* Some exploitation directors, like "Godfather of Gore" Herschell Gordon Lewis, were aware that exploitation was a one-time payment and so got into other careers while remaining happy about the recognition their films received. Other directors went back to the nine-to-five and became dentists, just letting their dream die. More than a few were bitter that they weren't as well regarded as Steven Spielberg and took a delusional attitude toward their own work. Many were as eccentric as their films, but all were interesting for different reasons.

From 1980 to 1982 I held weekly public screenings of my favorite difficult-to-see exploitation classics, like the sexy *The Big Doll House,* the funny and existential *Manson,* and the 1961 race hate film *I Spit on Your Grave.* These were small, discreet screenings in 16mm (harkening back to the era when "smokers" were shown in secret), and took place at long-gone hipster nightspots like Club 57, the Mudd Club, and Danceteria. At first, I rented movies through such companies as Budget Films, which had a large exploitation catalog. But to find what I *really* wanted, I had to take an adventurous ride into the heart of the exploitation world. As I went deeper and deeper, I got to study intimately the people who created the films and marketed them. Gradually, I was able to pinpoint the development of exploitation and its in-grown roots.

I'd call to rent films and I'd get a shrill "No! There is no *Farewell Uncle Tom*!" from a prissily offended Cannon Films worker. When I spoke to *High Yellow* distributor Harry Goldstone, one of the many indies who'd dropped out of the film business, he was old and irritable, as if he'd just been woken from a nap. Lorraine Borden screamed at me for not renting expensive screening rooms like the Rizzoli. A Troma co-principal threatened to punch my face when I exposed the bullying tactics of his company's insecure ex-attorney honcho. I spoke to a retired, relaxed Bob Cresse while he was at his mother's house in Florida. He bemoaned cinema's shift from softcore to hardcore, explaining that the latter's rigid requirements prevented him from exploring the very S&M and fetishes that had motivated him to make films like *Love Camp 7.* Bob told me how mirthless hardcore

was, how little fun it was to film actors performing real sex at his direction. The movie camera had led him to more bitterness than he could stand.

I received mentoring about film distribution from Ava Leighton, the very cool partner of Radley "Henry Paris" Metzger, both of whom were known for such adult classics as *The Opening of Misty Beethoven.* Ava was a shrewd cookie and knew the value of getting a hip quote on her poster for *The Lickerish Quartet* ("An Outrageously Kinky Masterpiece!"—Andy Warhol). She liked to know what pleased the public, and she earned my full respect. I began to see that, unlike in mainstream film, women held seats of power in the exploitation business.

In 1982, I became the first person in over a decade to revive Herschell Lewis's classic *Blood Feast.* I formed an alliance with Manhattan's 8th Street Playhouse, which showed a midnight movie each night of the week. This association gave birth to a monthlong *Sleazoid* festival in 1983, where I finally had access to 35mm theatrical prints of my dream picks—so long as they stayed within the limited $250-a-day rental budget. On 8th Street, long unseen Harry Novak releases like *Axe* and *I Dismember Mama* bumped shoulders with uncut versions of the first two *Ilsa* movies.



Despite my success (or maybe because of it), the old guard of the underground violently resisted my aesthetic excavations. Since I wrote about grindhouse films, these professional beatniks accused me of making the world a worse place. Jonas Mekas, for one, was livid that I'd once left *Sleazoid* flyers at a screening of *Chelsea Girls* at his Anthology Film Archives. To Mekas cohort Ken Jacobs, I was an example of everything that was evil and wrong with movies and the world in general. On the other hand, Ken Anger loved it.

Eventually, I expanded *Sleazoid* into four pages (offset printed, 11" × 17" folded), and raised the price to 50 cents. The larger format allowed more in-depth coverage of auteurs and genres. The sci-fi nerdery comic book store Forbidden Planet immediately banned the magazine because it once included a still of a topless female prisoner from Jess Franco's *Barbed Wire Dolls*—even though the store was doing a brisk trade in Georges Pichard's ghastly torture novels right at the front counter. Such responses only increased my dedication both to my subject and lifestyle.

Since age eighteen, when I was attending NYU, I'd held a string of uptight Wall Street jobs. I stuck it out until age twenty-two and then wound up for many

years on the Deuce, ostensibly as a theater worker. For four solid years I worked strictly in Times Square's vice universe—it was as if I had vanished into that *The Devil in Miss Jones* mural I'd glimpsed as a kid. I became an outsider to straight society. I memorized every inch of Times Square's topography and knew all the inhabitants who flocked to it for money and thrills. I spent my off hours going to the latest exploitation offerings at both Deuce grindhouses and big Broadway showcases like the Cinerama. I went home to my new apartment on East 14th Street only to sleep. I didn't want to miss a thing.

To get a good working gig at a major Deuce chain like Avon Theaters, you first had to build your chops in the area's roughest showcases, so my first job in Times Square was as the midnight-to-8 a.m. projectionist at the surreal, all-male Nightshift, where hustlers from the infamous Haymarket bar across the street hung out with their customers. Muggings and bloody needles were the order of the day. After this initiation, I became an Avon fixture, beginning as projectionist at the Bryant Theater on 42nd Street between 6th Avenue and Broadway. Stella, who ran the Avon chain, liked me. I hired live show teams, screened movies, worked in various box offices, and managed a little place called the Doll on 47th Street and 7th Avenue.

In Times Square, striking up associations was a quick business, and money always makes strange bedfellows. You could make co-conspirators or enemies very easily. In my Avon years, I got to know the murderous director Phil Prince, whose films later became the focus of the Meese Commission Report on Pornography. I became friendly with the hardcore actor George Payne, who had been a boyhood idol and was by then starring in Phil's movies. George was everything I had hoped for. He lived for the acting in the movies, not for the sex, and had a weird samurai resignation about the whole business.

I also struck up a friendship with Willie Sanders, whom I originally met while working at the Bryant. Willie and I later became coworkers when I managed the Doll theater and he ran Avon's "dime a dance" place upstairs, the Satin Ballroom. After working his way up the Avon chain, Willie became one of the more resolute and quiet people in the neighborhood, but he was one of the wisest instructors in human nature I'd ever encountered. He shared his voluminous Deuce knowledge with me, and was someone you could count on for anything, someone with whom you could discuss your worst traumas. Willie was very much the samurai even

though the girlies thought he looked like Marvin Gaye. To this day, he remains one of my closest and dearest friends.

When the Avon chain was collapsing under both government scrutiny and the scheming of local real estate interests, I worked at theaters run by bottom-feeder film distributor/exhibitor Chelly Wilson and her bewigged henchman, Phil Todero, and got to observe their machinations firsthand. This was during Times Square's most notorious, decrepit era, when the AIDS and crack epidemics were strangling 8th Avenue. And I became even more determined to document it all in *Sleazoid.* The magazine grew bigger, until it reached nearly sixteen pages and had a cover price of $2. Its public profits increased too, meriting write-ups in *Rolling Stone* and *Film Comment,* both of which Michelle Clifford saw while hiding out from society in a Ft. Lauderdale library. With his "Joker" T-shirt and loud purple Serruchi jacket, Bill Landis seemed a curious sight in the midst of a peep emporium. She thought, what the fuck is *his* story?



But I saw right through Bill. I knew everything he wrote about was true. Some people just wrote about movies, but he ripped the screen open. I spent my first six years in Boston and had seen more insanity and violence than most people do in a lifetime. I had been stuck in scenes where people had been murdered in front of me. My mother worked in the Combat Zone—a tinier, more criminally oriented version of the Deuce. So when I read Bill's stories I knew they were real and nobody else's writing ever talked to me before.



We started corresponding in 1985 and Michelle moved in in time for my twenty-seventh birthday, May 1986. She just turned twenty. And we fell in love. I picked her up at Newark Airport, we took a shuttle bus back to Manhattan, and the first soil she put her foot on was Times Square, 42nd Street. The Deuce seemed wee to her, like a little play school village on one L shaped block. One intense block. Later that night, we went on our first date to the Lyric Theater to see a horror cheapie, *Mountainside Motel Massacre;* and a Eurosleaze replay, *Women For Sale.*

In the dust of the wreckage, a few rays of light managed to shine through. In Seattle, Something Weird Video was beginning to search out the films I'd seen on the Deuce. In 1997, Michelle founded her critically acclaimed magazine, *Metasex,* about the most severe and criminal aspects of the vice industry. She forced me to write again. Suddenly, there appeared to be a demand for *Sleazoid Express,* one

that had never been satisfied by its numerous imitators and one whose legacy had never fully been abandoned. In spring 1999, *Sleazoid* was relaunched as a collaboration between Michelle and me, exploring films that were now back on video. All the movies I loved were back. We had an official "coming out" hosted by Joel Shepard at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco. It was strange to be back, talking about Times Square. But it felt right.

Bill Landis/Michelle Clifford
NYC 2002

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# SLEAZOID EXPRESS

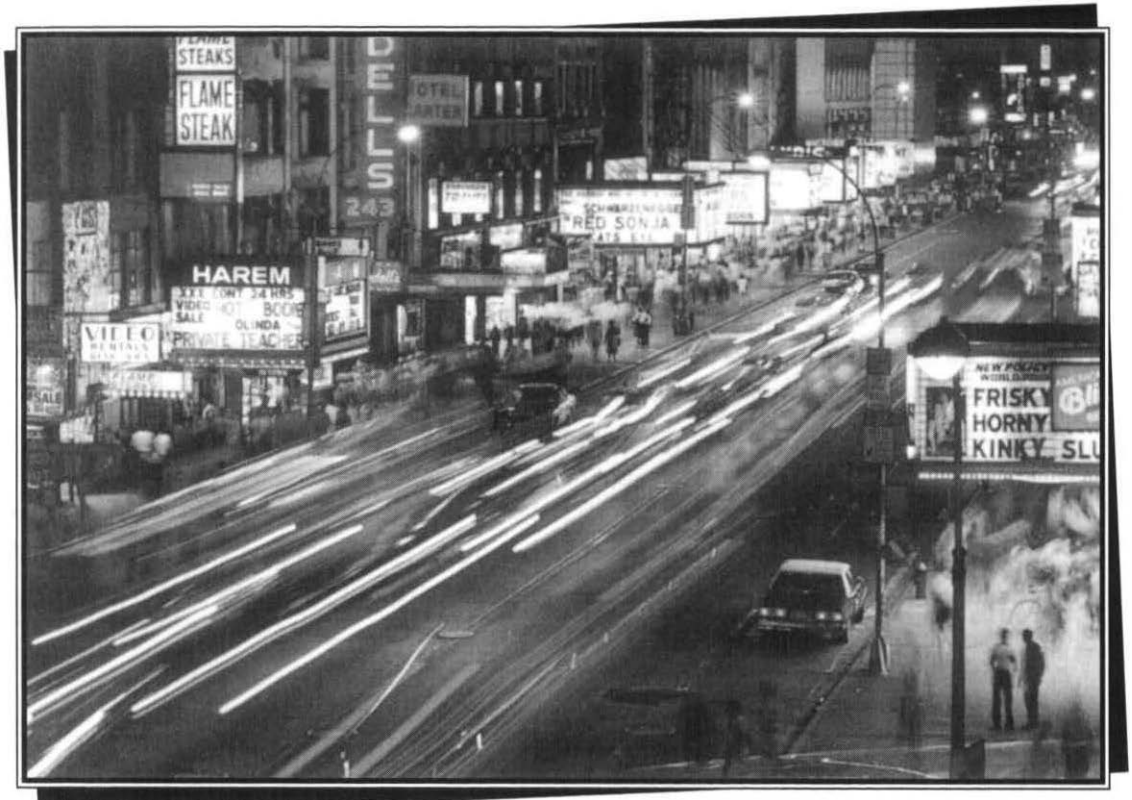
# Introduction

**Times Square was America's most notorious red-light district, located within the** esteemed Broadway theater hub. From the early 1960s its main artery was known as the Deuce, a tiny strip of grimy neon and concrete that coldly fleshed out 42nd Street between 7th and 8th Avenues. The street was wall-to-wall grindhouses, down-at-the heels creations left over from the Minsky's Burlesque days, old theaters that retained a stained, velour elegance and an imposing physicality, with large auditoriums, balconies, big screens, velvet curtains, and long ago closed-off opera seats.

The grindhouses were neighbored by negative-current adult bookstores, male street hustlers, weapons shops, phony drug salesmen, bootleg electronics stores, and tourist junk shops. Older black guys with Polaroids around their necks offered quickie portraits to couples who would sit in their wicker chairs.

The Playland Arcade was the unbearably loud gateway to the Deuce and a known nest of bad eggs: kids skipping school, low-level drug dealers, chain snatchers. Junkies alone in their heroin/cocaine dreamworld tried to become one with the game. Predatory chickenhawks spying on underage trade looked for pick-ups. Sprinkled throughout the arcade were male prostitutes of all ages. It was a male haunt, a place to go when you had nothing to do, all covered in a cacophony of bells and pings and screaming machines. Couples could pop in quickly to have their snapshots taken in the old-fashioned black-and-white photo booth and make out behind the little curtain partition while they waited for the snaps to develop.

Across the street from Playland, you knocked right into Blackjack Books, one of 42nd Street's true dens of iniquity. Blackjack drew all sorts of high-frequency sexual activity. It was two floors of raunch. Upstairs, Blackjack had a mini-theater called the Frisco that presented a live S&M show, a seventies update of old-style B&D burlesque. It featured a playacted twenty-minute episode with an audiotape libretto, semi-clad female performers, and strobe-lit whipping. Live sex shows or








quickie live peeps of two nude women undulating were available to those to sit or stand behind little partitions, dropping quarters to make the curtain rise. Live show teams and the change cashiers sold quarter ounces of grass to other live show performers and workers from neighboring adult theaters.

Blackjack's downstairs section featured large peep booths that displayed classics like the Serena S&M loop, *Girls Behind Bars*, alongside the Linda Lovelace fistfucking, footfucking, and dog movies. The gay section was hopping, with amyl nitrate sold right at the counter to jack up the experience. Flocks of black and Latin hustlers moseyed around looking to make a fast ten bucks. The magazine area was well trodden, with wall racks and tables *filled* with the latest slicks for every sexual preference.

Down the street from Blackjack, at the midpoint of the south side of 42nd Street between 7th and 8th, was the threadbare freakshow called Hubert's Museum. Tiny Tim had started his showbiz career playing the hermaphrodite here.

Hubert's also housed a flea circus. The museum gradually turned into a scuzzy hustler arcade. It closed in 1977 and was reincarnated as the mirrored scumatorium Peepland, which announced itself with a giant reproduction of a quarter. Peepland often ran the more graphic and shocking European loops, from Lasse Braun's twisted mini-epics to "Color Climax," the dirty bookstore code for Scandinavian bestiality imports.

Transsexuals, hustlers, and closety guys with a fetishistic homo- or heterosexual itch to scratch populated the street. It was common to see porn stars whose films were playing at the adult houses promenade down the block. Times Square was a ten-block, two-avenue living protoplasm designed to get you off by any means necessary. Were you a freak? Not when you stepped onto the Deuce. Being a freak there would get you money, attention, entertainment, a starring part in a movie. Or maybe a robbery and a beating.

Times Square had been a risqué place since the roaring twenties and the most intense tenderloin district since. The Minsky's Burlesque houses alternated ribald humor with dance numbers that were America's equivalent of the can-can. As early as the turn of the 20th century, sex magick king Aleister Crowley trolled around Times Square looking to pick up female streetwalkers or catch a casual homosexual liaison in the area's Turkish baths. It's been a pilgrimage for many into sexual magick.

Shaped by an overwhelming sexual history, and dotted with a proliferation of blatantly sex-related businesses, the Deuce remained the most intense venue one could ever hope to see a movie in. The Deuce grindhouses were showcases for the wildest and most extreme films in cinematic history, and ticket buyers were of all sorts: depressives hiding from jobs, sexual obsessives, inner-city people seeking cheap diversions, teenagers skipping school, adventurous couples on dates, couples-chasers peeking on them, people getting high, homeless people sleeping, pickpockets. This disenfranchised audience had nowhere else to go, and the grindhouses were where they all wound up. They were film's harshest critics, and demanded that the exploitation movies the theaters screened lived up to the promises made by their graphic, outrageous ad campaigns and shocking trailers. If the movies let them down, the audience would react by shouting, tossing food containers, and physically damaging the theaters. For exploitation movie lovers, going to a Deuce grindhouse was like taking your life in your hands for a cinematic

thrill—which, of course, added to the fun and increased the shock status of the experience.

The theaters were all connected via a labyrinth of back doors. They each had their exploitation genre specializations, but the same triple feature could end up ping-ponging up and down the street, through three different grindhouses, in one week.

Different theater chains that had their main pulse in Times Square owned the grindhouses. Brandt Theaters ran the majority of the 42nd Street grindhouses—the New Amsterdam, Victory, Harris, Lyric, Liberty, Times Square, Apollo, and Selwyn. A related chain called Bingo Brandt, specialists in the merchandising of sex since the nudist-camp days, owned the Rialto I and II, and the Globe. The Cine 1 and 2 Twins, the Deuce's premiere specialists in kung fu films, were part of a chain that owned a string of ghetto action houses. The worst-kept and most menacing of the Deuce grindhouses was the Anco, located across the street from the Port Authority Bus Terminal.





Major chains owned many of the big glitzy palaces on Broadway and 7th Avenue from 44th Street to 49th Street, which were safer and cleaner. The Embassy chain had turned the huge DeMille Theater into a comfy triplex. United Artists' Rivoli was one enormous auditorium with a thunderously huge screen. The Cinerama 1 and 2 were essential to a splendid Broadway viewing experience, either in the coliseum structure upstairs of the Cinerama 2 or the large street-level mezzanine of the Cinerama 1.

Exploitation films that played the Times Square grindhouse circuit were triumphs of the will, artistically. Their auteurs were the antitheses of the snobs who populated the art/underground film world. Their exploitation films made money. They were able to work within the narrative formula of beginning, middle, and end, despite whatever quirks and kinks their stories held. Compared to the mainstream, exploitationeers had more freedom from Hollywood rules and regulations concerning explicit sex and violence, and they fulfilled their pact with an audience for an hour and a half. Exploitation films let their freak flags fly high. Their men were the most violent. Their women were shystie, sadistic bitches or masochists who were able to withstand the ninth circle of hell—and, of course, erotically speaking, they put out more and knew what they were doing sexually. But watch out: Female-on-male rape wouldn't be beneath them.

Exploitation was closer to the chaos of real life. Innovative and challenging, the pictures featured hyper-real reproductions of real-time events, penetrating character analysis by relatively unknown but brilliant actors, and imaginative handheld camera work. A special kind of alchemy happens when unintended effects become aesthetically transcendent. Owing to economics, or to an inexperienced yet inventive performer or director, a scene can turn out more hilariously funny or powerfully shocking than if it were made by the best cast and crew money can buy. From the beginning of filmmaking, exploitation's been right there. *Birth of a Nation* is a race-hate film, but is looked at as a document of America and used as evidence of D. W. Griffith's genius by those who revere him.

Exploitation filmmakers, actors, and writers were in it because they loved and were devoted to their obsessions. They couldn't be any other way. Many tried, but the tide just brought them back to exploitation. The smarter ones were able to build mainstream careers by learning how to blend in, chameleon-like, commercializing their deviancy. The goal of these films is to give viewers exactly what they're looking for, in terms of sex, violence, and/or pure visceral shock. And if you look hard and deep into them, you can see the entire psychosexual structure of human behavior.

AIDS and crack were the final nail in the Deuce's coffin, leaving it a dangerous, unsightly shambles, a land of the walking dead, an abscess on the isle of Manhattan. In the 1980s, during the administration of Mayor Ed Koch, City Hall struck a deal with real estate developers that signaled the beginning of the end of the grindhouses.

Home video became viable at this same time, plucking anyone halfway sane out of the Deuce's audience. But you can't hold off human nature. People still came, just fewer and fewer of them. The area was thinning, and what was left behind was terminal. City Hall deemed it an infectious malignancy that needed to be cut out. One by one, the landmark grindhouses closed. Big Wayne, a longtime Times Square theater worker, bar bouncer, and theater manager, was working at the Venus theater, a notorious all-night porn grindhouse on 8th Avenue that attracted a lot of sleepers and guys into casual sex. "The police came about 1 a.m. and just told everyone quietly that the theater was being shut down. They said, 'Everyone just leave.' I wouldn't be arrested." It was a quiet way for City Hall to say The End, better than a big raid with news crews and newspaper coverage.

The Liberty Theater held on longer than any grindhouse on the Deuce. The last film to play here was *Falling Down,* and *every* audience member—regardless of ethnicity or sexual orientation—sat spellbound at Michael Douglas's rage against a pustulating America, cheering him on in his tantrum.

Meanwhile, outside, the decomposition was completed by a gaudy city-sponsored "Art" cover-up. Closed grindhouses that had provided their audiences with so many hours of happiness were now rotting and covered in pathetic short poetry, inane thoughts hijacking marquee space where the titles used to be. It was like seeing a corpse defiled and spat at.

By the close of the 1990s, the Deuce was bulldozed to make way for the "New 42nd Street." Today's Times Square has a Disney-dominated *Blade Runner* aesthetic, designed to service New York's international tourist market.

The old Times Square was killed, but the films—the life force of those grindhouses and the blood that ran through their veins—remain alive. These films are like tiny pieces of the Deuce, spreading to millions across the globe through video and DVD. With 42nd Street gone, wildly successful home-entertainment companies have sprung up to fill the void, selling the films that once haunted the Deuce. Walk into any mainstream video store and you'll see exploitation genres sublimated into euphemisms like *independent, horror, supernatural, documentary, action/adventure,* or *mature adult.* No more hard seats, sticky floors, and menacing audience members. Exploitation movie lovers now enjoy their entertainment in the safety of their bedrooms, watching their favorite films over and over, gleefully programming their own double and triple features, recreating the art of the arrangement of a Deuce triple bill.

The Deuce premiered some of the most extraordinarily shocking movies in cinema. People want to know what it was like to see these films in the most severe, surreal, sexual spot in the world. So take a seat in the front row with us, where it's big and ugly. The movie's starting—watch your wallets and stay out of the bathroom.

# one

# Bitch Goddess: Madame Olga Works the Cameo

**Located on 8th Avenue between 44th and 45th Streets, the Cameo Theater had an** enormous marquee that dwarfed the many nearby shoebox theaters, which had names like Show and Tell. Adjacent to the Cameo was a small players' bar, where pimps and prostitutes congregated between tricks. The Cameo showed the most extreme hardcore pornography, which drew dedicated audiences of hard-X film fans. These ranged from old stocking cap–and peacoat-clad Popeyes from Brooklyn, Queens, and Jersey City, to shy, slyly secretive middle-class white guys who'd made the pilgrimage from the surrounding tri-state area via the Port Authority Bus Terminal. Aggressive junkie streetwalkers would troll the audience for ten-dollar tricks. Over-the-edge sexual outlaws sought out all-male action in the two busy toilets in the back. Black transsexual messes barking "Honey, want anything for five dollars?" were commonplace. While most of the audience looked at them in horror, a few desperate oldsters seeking manual relief would take them up on their offer.

**"Orgies always had a special meaning for me, although I didn't participate physically."**

–Audrey Campbell as Madame Olga in *White Slaves of Chinatown*

The Cameo was located down-and-dirty right on what was known in the mid-1970s as the "Minnesota Strip." The boulevards of sexual and financial needs collided here, attracting underage runaways like moths to a flame. It was a block so deep-fried in its own grizzle that it was held up nationwide as a pinnacle of American degeneracy, a sexual Bermuda Triangle where porn, exploitation filmmaking, and prostitution were linked together. It was a point of infamy in American archeology.

The Cameo was owned by Chelly Wilson, the ipsissimis of Times Square's pyramid of pornographic film producers, exhibitors, and directors. She had an illustrious pedigree in the history of bottom-draw exploitation film, bringing the

world everything from black-and-white softcore straight movies to gay hardcore movies. A Greek émigré, Chelly named her theaters after love-characters from Hellenic mythology, such as Venus, Eros, and Adonis. Although she was married and had had three children with a blind man who lived in Puerto Rico, Chellywas openly gay and lived in a ménage à trois with two hard-boiled girlfriends, one with a jet-black concrete beehive and black wraparound sunglasses. Home was a gaudy faux Roma-style apartment above her all-male Eros Theater, directly across the street from the Cameo. Chelly was an obsessive full-time manager. People would come to her for jobs, money, referrals, help when they got out of jail, or loans for medical emergencies.

Chelly had hired a clutch of illegal West Indian immigrants to work exclusively at the Cameo, and had them supplementing their tiny off-the-books pay envelopes with welfare. They were trained well and terrified to steal, not wanting to rock any boats that would send them back to Port-au-Prince. Chelly was aware of both the collector mentality and a theft practice common among Times Square job-jumpers: stealing film prints and presenting them as trophies to new employees in exchange for jobs, bartering them for cash from collectors, or walking them over to a competing theater chain and demanding a job.

Like drones, the Cameo workers were perpetually shuffling prints between the top floor above Chelly's apartment at the Venus and the large, loft-sized floor above the Cameo. Chelly had been an exhibitor and distributor since the 1920s, and these spaces were her dusty attic, containing her softcore productions like *Confessions of a Psycho Cat,* Greek films she distributed during the 1950s and 1960s, posters in Greek, and well-worn audience favorites like *Johnny Wadd* that she also rented out to other adult theater owners.

By the 1980s, Chelly had renamed the Cameo the Adonis and installed video projection. The old Adonis, on 50th Street and 8th Avenue, had been Chelly's all-male showcase for over a decade, but a combination of big Times Square real estate takeovers and new Board of Health regulations against public sex in adult theaters had forced it out. Its last incarnation was as a dirty Indo-Pak bookstore/scumatorium.

During the 1972–1977 porno-chic era, the Cameo's kinky fare drew elbow-to-elbow crowds of voyeur film lovers, who ran to the theater before any loathsome hack censor's scissors could whittle down their kicks. Despite the chaotic atmo-

sphere inside the theater and outside on the street, appreciative crowds always packed in for premieres of films like Alex De Renzy's sado-scatological *Femmes de Sade,* the cinema verité stocking-mask rape/bondage prototype *Masters of Discipline,* and Bob Cresse's *Love Slaves,* enjoying the movies and laughing in the right places. After you bought a ticket from the box office on the street for $5—the top ticket price in Times Square at the time—you walked directly into the large auditorium with its dark, musty-smelling walls.

Chelly's Cameo Theater had kick-started its kinky reputation back in pre-hardcore 1964 with the Olga trilogy—*Olga's Girls, White Slaves of Chinatown,* and *Olga's House of Shame*—the series that birthed the bitch-mama exploitation movie genre. Madame Olga could really dish it out—and she was worshipped and respected for it.

A pitiless woman who makes her living torturing girls less cunning than herself for the benefit of her male gangster bosses, Olga was the first significant icon of female dominance in film, running prostitution and drugs throughout New York and using bondage and discipline as the tools of her trade. Olga is a moll, a mob subcontractor, a pusher, a madam, and a dominatrix. She's got it all under control.

As incarnated by sexploitation star Audrey Campbell, Olga has a slim but shapely figure, a slight cat-that-ate-the-canary sneer, intense eyes, and long, dark hair that she keeps in control with a ponytail or wraps tightly in a bun when dealing with her gangster bosses. Olga dresses in a sadist's outfit of tight black capri pants, tailored white shirt, and stiletto heels. When she rolls up her sleeves, Olga's usually getting down to the business of working a girl over who's fucked up.

The *Olga* pictures hit at the perfect moment in American cinematic and sexual history. By 1964, the nudie-cutie format established by Russ Meyer's *The Immoral Mr. Teas* (1959) had grown tired and repetitive. *Olga* brought S&M vividly to life at a time when these fetishes were deeply closeted in America, and were so thoroughly associated with illegality that in 1955 Senator Estes Kefauver dragged bondage pinup queen Bettie Page to Washington as part of his anti-pornography campaign, which was then focusing on Page's photographer Irving Klaw. Moreover, news of the 1963 Christine Keeler scandal, in which kinky sex shenanigans brought down the conservative British government, reached curious American shores. Despite societal taboos against S&M, however, the *Olga* films fit neatly

into the legalistic strictures imposed on films. They featured minimal nudity within a set precedent: Sex acts were alluded to rather than depicted graphically. Setting the stage for the "roughie" genre they spearheaded, the climaxes appeared not as orgasms but as outbursts of violence.

*Olga* emerged from the offices of Stan Borden's company, American Film Distributing. Stan was an overweight, gregarious man with rumored connections to the Jewish mob. He had originally entered the film industry by distributing art house hits like *Kanal* and *Ballad of a Soldier,* which he imported from behind the Iron Curtain. However, after his early success with the British nudist-camp movie *Sunswept,* Stan felt that exploitation movies were both profitable and better suited to his personality.

Stan set up American Film Distributing in a three-room mezzanine suite in the Paramount Hotel, located right on 46th Steet off Broadway, in the throbbing heart of Times Square. The suite became a salon for the best and brightest stars of the Manhattan exploitation film world. After making *Take Me Naked,* Mike and Roberta Findlay joined Stan's fold and subsequently entered an enormously productive period in their marriage, producing such classic films as their *Flesh* trilogy (see chapter 2). The Findlays' collaborators, the Amero brothers, John and Lem, eventually went their own way but sold Stan their marvelous *The Lusting Hours.* Doris Wishman, auteur of *Bad Girls Go to Hell* and later director of the tranny classic *Let Me Die a Woman* (see chapter 4), could often be found hanging out. You'd find the people behind *Olga*—producer George Weiss, director Joe Mawra, and Madame Olga herself, Audrey Campbell—socializing and chatting at Stan's office at all hours of the day and night. Stan sat behind a desk cluttered with piles of pressbooks, constantly smoking a huge cigar. Spittle ran down his mouth and cigar ashes littered his shirt. Nonetheless, people genuinely liked Stan. He was slobbering, but he was personable, and he offered filmmakers what they felt was a fair shake in the one-time-sale world of exploitation distribution. As the distributor, he'd front filmmakers $15,000 for a movie that cost $5,000 to produce, paid in three monthly installments. At the time, that represented a tidy profit.

Stan's own taste for the lurid and outrageous fed the diverse talents of those with whom he had surrounded himself. They were encouraged to be themselves as much as possible, which ultimately contributed to the permanence of their films.

Closer to home, Stan's wife, Lorraine, was a shrill, domineering woman who ran Great Scott Advertising, which developed ad campaigns for American Film Distributing and other exploitation companies. Reminiscent of 1930s *Bizarre Classix* bondage comics, Stan's ads for the *Olga* series combined caricatures of a sadistic female puppet master with violent stills from the films themselves. Not unlike Olga, Lorraine was one tough piece of woman. As actor Jamie Gillis recalls, "Lorraine was tall, blonde, and a bitch." Stan loved her.

The man who brought *Olga* to the screen was producer George Weiss, whose history in exploitation film dated back to the roadshow era. His early specialty was roadshow epics like *Test Tube Babies* which used the exposé format to sneak sexual subject matter past censorship boards. Although they claimed to be newsworthy or educational, the films were nothing but lurid in intent and execution. Weiss had a Jungian feel for the sordid American S&M unconscious and its expression through exploitation films, and had produced Edward D. Wood Jr.'s *Glen or Glenda* (see chapter 4) for its cross-dressing kink after Christine Jorgensen's sex change had made worldwide headlines. By the time he produced the *Olga* movies, Weiss had been seasoned to audiences' kinky lusts.

Weiss was old, but he was the type of guy who had always looked old, anyway. He was short, had a wry little smile and an arid sense of humor, and his somewhat stooped posture made him hunched, forcing him to look up at people. Thin, white-haired, and severe looking, he was the archetype of the man who haunted specialty Manhattan fetish outlets like 42nd Street's tiny Keystone Books, Forsythia Books, and Kinematics. As Stan put it, the *Olga* movies were "all George's babies," labors of love for him.

George and Stan were friends because Stanley was handling a lot of his product, so Weiss would often come into Stan's office just for something to do. People didn't know where he lived, but it always seemed that he came in to work on the subway. Weiss always looked like he was breathing his last, because he was bone-thin, small, and always cold. Yet he entertained people with stories about the roadshow days of exploitation films. He became very close with Mike Findlay, in particular. They'd congregate in Stan's office, sadomasochistic brethren.

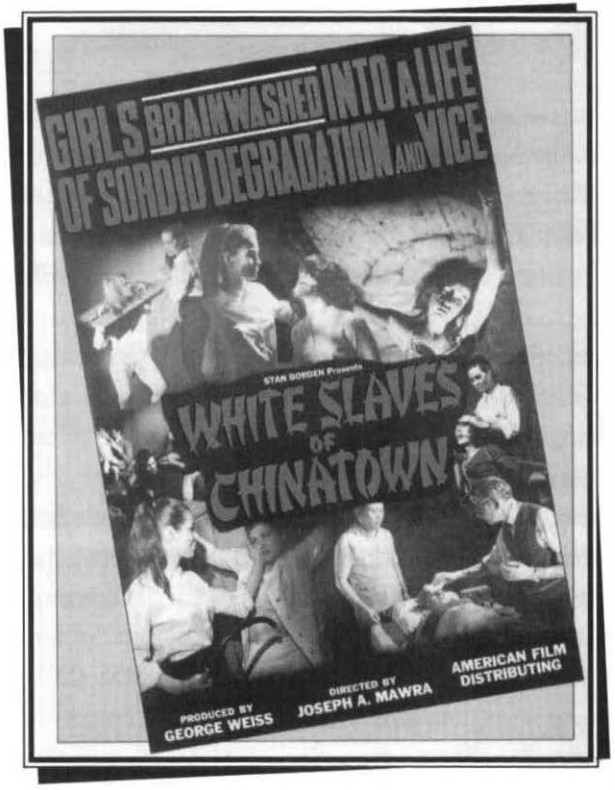
For his leading lady, Weiss chose the raven-haired Audrey Campbell, who gave off an appropriate air of menace. Audrey was a veteran of other early sexploitation films that Stan had distributed, such as *Sin in the Suburbs,* which

costarred another female dominance star on the rise, Dyanne Thorne (see chapter 9). To direct the *Olga* series, Weiss hired Joe Mawra, who was little more than his errand boy. A short, dark-haired, quiet man, Mawra made a low-key impression on people. They shot all the films in New York or New Jersey. Stan would rent the Presidential Suite in the New Yorker Hotel on 34th Street and 8th Avenue for the weekend. As Stan recalled, "Figure as long as you plan it right you can shoot everything in two days. You come in on a Friday night and by Sunday at one or two o'clock you had it."

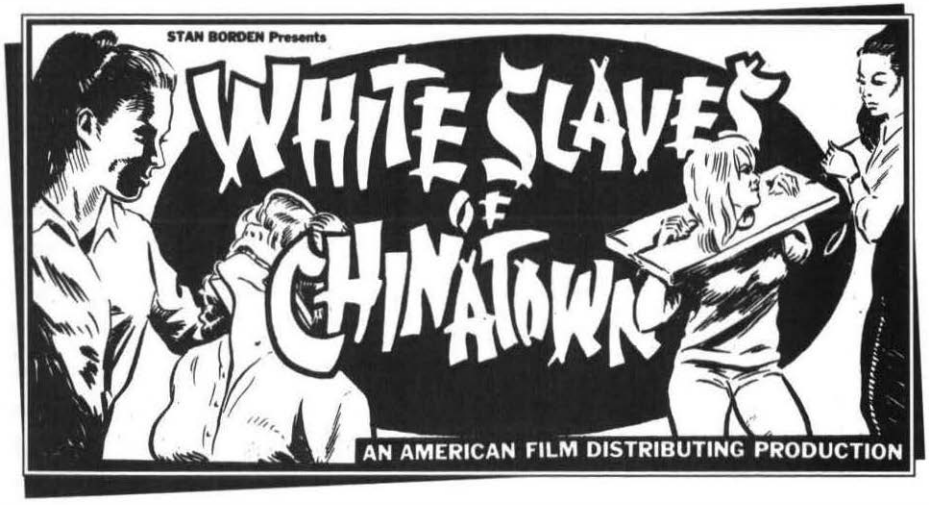
Each *Olga* movie has its own distinctive style, but they were collectively presented as parts of a serial. Olga doesn't bait and tease for a few minutes, but delivers her promises unrelentingly in running times of about an hour. Weiss integrates many methods of mayhem from his roadshow days, like the fried-bacon narration that jump-starts each *Olga* movie. He's paying lip service to being socially redemptive (in his *Traffic in Souls* manner), but is aware that it's just an excuse to supply the viewer with captions for the S&M caricatures that burst to life on screen. Weiss depicts drug use as a fetish in the *Cocaine Fiends* or *Marijuana, the Devil's Weed* fashion. There's the implied loss of sexual control while stoned, and once Olga strings the girls out on hard stuff, they're out of luck. She turns them out and breaks them.

The stark, black-and-white Kodachrome-era *Olga* movies contain bondage and discipline scenes that are long, explicit, and contain the appropriate nudity. Like fragments of a disturbing dreamscape, the movies set their high-voltage sadomasochism against a backdrop of go-go dancing, lesbian encounters, tossed-off gangster melodramatics, and long silent stretches mixed with incongruous music. Repetitive location shots of early 1960s Manhattan sustain the mood but also give viewers a chance to gasp for air between the juicy portions.

The *Olga* movies contain stripteases by veterans of the Deuce's down-at-the-heels burlesque houses, dry-humping expressions of self-pleasure that avoided the actual graphic sex forbidden at the time. (These were the same women who appeared in the 8mm loops sold in the back pages of the lurid detective and cheesecake magazines so popular during the early 1960s.) Weiss simmered everything into a white-hot brew, making the *Olga* movies succinct, succulent encapsulations of America's closet S&M erotology. The films are a pre–Robert Mapplethorpe/Helmut Newton graphic iconography of sexual sadism.


GIRLS BRAINWASHED INTO A LIFE OF SORDID DEGRADATION AND VICE
STAN BORDEN Presents
WHITE SLAVES OF CHINATOWN
PRODUCED BY GEORGE WEISS
DIRECTED BY JOSEPH A. MAWRA
AMERICAN FILM DISTRIBUTING

(Top) Shockingly graphic one sheet for *White Slaves of Chinatown*; (bottom) the 1930s bondage artwork ad campaign used in newspapers. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection, courtesy Something Weird Video and the Farros family)



The three key *Olga* movies—*White Slaves of Chinatown*, *Olga's Girls,* and *Olga's House of Shame*—were all first released in 1964 to resounding success, opening at the Rialto on Broadway and enjoying lengthy runs at the Cameo. The first film, *White Slaves of Chinatown,* is the most erotically intense and aesthetically perfect. The film opens with quick views of Chinatown. Faux newspaper headlines Weiss culled from 30s roadshow movies appear warning girls of white slavery and drug addiction. The film proceeds to set up basic S&M situations within the template of a dominant woman breaking in new slaves. The slaves' backgrounds, ranging from classy to criminal, provide the motivation for their treatment.

*White Slaves of Chinatown* is a sexy pastiche that floats by the viewer in a hypnotic, stream-of-consciousness manner. The location shots provide the exterior punctuation for the S&M episodes, with Chinatown looking as dirty, aged, and grungy then as it does today, albeit less populated and with better-dressed inhabitants. Olga's lair is a tenement off Essex Street. Repetitive Charlie Chan music bursts through the narration, growing unbearably loud as the scene intensifies, then disappearing.





Next scene: Olga in a chauffeured 50s junkwagon, being driven up to the Tombs, the infamously filthy Manhattan jail that borders Chinatown, to select and train her new slaves. She picks up Lola, a sleazy brunette. Much of the action takes place in Olga's basement, which is quite a sight. A pan of the wall reveals many levels of whips, cuffs, clamps, crops—an entire array of discipline devices waiting to be used.

Olga slowly descends the stairs, with one eyebrow arched. Inside, the basement dungeon is dimly lit. Frenchy is cowering in it. A well-built blonde with a sultry, defiant look, Frenchy is the focus of much of Olga's (and the audience's) attention. Another troublemaker, Greta, is introduced hung by her arms, having run slightly afoul of Olga's nerves. Lola's hair is yanked back and a lock of it is forced into her mouth, in shadow silhouette against a wall.



Now it's Frenchy's turn to be subjected to Olga's dominance training. She's made to wear a yoke, by which Olga drags her around, and is forced to kneel on the filthy concrete. The Charlie Chan music grows hellishly loud again. Frenchy is finally brought to an interrogation room and forced to forge letters as part of a shakedown scheme aimed at her diplomat dad. The minimalist, severe composi-

tion recalls Carl Dreyer's witchhunt classic, *Day of Wrath.* Frenchy won't sign the letters, so she's thrown back in the basement dungeon as the narrator passionately details the rats and damp cold that await her. Meanwhile, Olga ties another slave, Colette, to a chair, restraining her with a wooden bar across her chest.

Olga prepares to meet her syndicate bosses as the narrator rattles off invented facts about opium dens in Chinatown. The movie veers into a fetishized pot party, with women making ecstatic faces as smoky 50s sax music rolls. Audrey Campbell's voice takes over from the narrator. Olga strips, providing the first lingering topless shot in the movie.

Little Chinese dolls spin as Olga whips her next target: sexy, dark-haired Elaine. With a pregnant cohort's assistance, Olga forces a ponytailed victim's fingers into a press. The pregnant girl shoots up and her eyes roll back in narcomania. She does a simulated, you-see-it-but-you-don't masturbation scene. In an intense B&D session, Lola is tied to a chair. A long pan reveals her to be hanging upside down. Elaine, strapped to a table, receives Chinese water torture as Frenchy languishes against a cold brick wall.

George Weiss does a startlingly self-aware, grotesquely comical character turn as "Doc," the Mafia physician-on-duty who performs an illegal abortion on Olga's junkie moll. The syndicate strongarm is also present, played by what looks like an overweight Chinese waiter. Weiss removes his rubber gloves as the narrator informs us pithily that his patient is dead. "Chalk up another one for this filthy old butcher!"

Olga says she "needs a man." She dresses down in another loop-like segment, letting the viewer peek on her as she exhibits herself, with and without her sexy threads. But all too soon it's back to business. Rust never sleeps for Madame Olga. One of the whores, Janice, has been making trouble, so Olga ties her down, rips her bra off, and burns her with a cigarette to show her where it's at. The cigarette approaches the camera lens in a point-of-view (POV) shot. We leave Janice weeping and groveling.

Elaine preens in front of a mirror as the narrator cautions against opium use. Lola and Elaine climb a tenement staircase and head towards an apartment. Inside, Olga snaps her fingers and four of her slaves pose for a photo session. In a beautiful denouement that encapsulates the film's dominance/puppet-master theme, the girls pose submissively as Olga arranges them.

*White Slaves of Chinatown* closes over location shots of a dim-sum parlor and a neon dragon atop a bar. The narrator warns that "this should never happen again." A personal favorite of many *Olga* aficionados, the movie delivers the goods relentlessly, leaving no erotic stone unturned.

*Olga's Girls* is the film noir of the *Olga* series. While *White Slaves of Chinatown* utilized repeated location shots, *Olga's Girls* is a more interior, womb-like film that's written from the perspective of one of Olga's bosses. It all takes place in the same few rooms and a basement.

Set the mood: Lavish orchestral swing music plays as a faceless woman walks down a dark hallway. The narrator introduces Olga as a queen of vice and narcotics. She barters with a pimp over the value of three girls.

Susie and Colette decide to shoot up. Bunny, a light-skinned black woman in a black bra and panties, combs Olga's hair. Judy helps Olga into her leather "Cape of Persuasion." There's business to take care of in the dungeon. Connie waits there, clad in a chastity belt over her big white 50s panties. The narrator refers to the basement as Olga's "Den of Persuasion." A pan reveals a wall of whips—the tools of Olga's trade. Olga dramatically rips off Connie's bra and flogs her viciously. Susie and Lelia, two of Olga's slaves, cut dope with playing cards.

Olga has more than a passing fancy for Bunny, who she's just subjected to some training. Olga releases Bunny from a chastity belt, as her voice announces, "This hurts me more than it hurts you," then goes on in a flat monotone, complaining about the exhausting hassle of being a vice queen, always having to keep her pawns in line.

Judy, who's bosomy and robust in that perfect masochistic "I can take it all" way, is bound and gagged, wearing only her black bra and panty set. Olga, clad in her cape of persuasion, gives electroshock torture to Judy's legs as her big tits wriggle out of that black bra.

In a gangster plot subtext, we see a map of Manhattan as the narrator gives a hard-boiled 30s narco rap about the urban scourges of marijuana, heroin, and opium. In a frenzied effort at providing redeeming social value, the narration jumps the rail and becomes an anti-communist tract.

Back to the show: Judy is released from the dungeon all sooty, with mussed-up hair. The *Olga* movies know the sex appeal of women when they've gone

through the mill and look raunchy. "She's filthy," bitches Olga. A lyrical shower scene follows.

Olga dusts off her cape as she grumbles about trying to run a business. "I've got plenty of my own problems," she complains. "Why don't they behave? Lousy tramps, every one." Olga tortures Connie with a blowtorch, with a POV shot of the flame. Two girls sit in a cage watching, eating from dog bowls.

A straightforward whipping scene of blonde Kitty follows. The gangster exposition reappears. Olga, with her hair up in a severe bun, talks to a bunch of old guys. One is named "Mr. B" in honor of Stan Borden. "The bosses were really rough on Olga," declares the narrator. "They had her against the wall with *both* barrels." There's an informant in the organization, and Olga has 48 hours to weed the snitch out.

Kitty keeps making trouble. Classical music plays as Kitty's head is held back and part of her tongue is snipped off. A view of torture devices and whips segues into wild go-go dancing. The narrator indicates that it's a pot party. Sax and organ music play wildly as the girls bump and grind, striking men's magazine poses. Olga announces that they're on cloud nine.

After having her tongue shortened, Kitty's depressed mood leads her to mainlining and overdosing. George Weiss, again appearing as "Doc," confirms her death. Such a mishap won't go over well with Olga's bosses. In a scene reminiscent of *Blood Feast* (see chapter 6), Kitty's body is dismembered and Olga feeds it to a furnace to rid herself of this inconvenience.

Time is running out—Olga's got to find that snitch. She puts Colette in the stocks and works her over for any possible info. Olga then turns to Bunny for some extracurricular relief. Audrey Campbell's voice narrates this lesbian encounter with the passion of a hypnosis instructor.

Colette unites with two other girls to break from Olga's organization and form their own whorehouse. Olga finds out and snaps, "You dirty two-bit tramps!" They overpower her, handcuffing her and giving her a taste of her own sour medicine.

Olga is rescued by her loyal slave, Judy, then ferrets out the location of the rogue whores' operation by kidnapping and torturing Lorraine (named in tribute to Mrs. Borden). As Colette and her pals celebrate at a cocktail party below a sign reading "UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT," Olga appears—to their horror. She snickers,

crosses off the word "NEW," and writes in "OLD." From her cat-that-ate-the-canary expression and the terrified looks on the faces of the girls, you know Olga's going to put them through hell. And you're left on the edge of your seat, begging for more as the movie ends, promising future installments. *Olga's Girls* is a big-band version of S&M, and its riffs will play in your mind long after you've seen it.

*Olga's House of Shame* has the most opulent settings yet grittiest tone of the series. The settings are opened up. You get a deserted factory in upstate New York, where girls ride a little train car back and forth. It's like Georges Pichard's French comic, *L'Usine,* about delinquent girls forced to work on a wealthy sadist's train collection. It's also the first *Olga* talkie, complete with dialogue in addition to the narration. However, in contrast to the movie's opened-up and airy setting, the spo-

Stolen jewels incur a beating doled out by Olga's homosexual brother. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection, courtesy Something Weird Video and the Farros family)

ken exchanges occur during claustrophobic interior episodes of psychodrama that are tawdry and naked, with personalities revealing themselves in a Warholian manner. *Olga's House of Shame* has the sleaziest-looking cast of the three films, with all the subsidiary females looking like aging Bettie Page imitators—grizzled, dark-haired, and prone to giving Olga belly dancing displays.

*Olga's House of Shame* introduces a new male character: Johnny, Olga's brother, played as a prototypical 1960s Times Square criminal type, shifty and homosexually inclined. The narrative involves Johnny's jewel heisting and an attempt by Elaine, one of Olga's slaves, to rip him off. Elaine stands out because she's a big-haired Ronettes-era hopper who's younger and more attractive than her grizzled competitors.

Much is made of some stolen jewels. Elaine is tied to a chair and worked over by both Johnny and Olga. The outdoor setting gives the audience the opportunity to witness Olga's version of pony-girl training.

Elaine tries to make a dramatic escape. She gets soaking wet running through a stream. Johnny and Olga follow in hot pursuit. Johnny's wearing a terry cloth Miami Beach jumpsuit, and you see his balls jiggling as he runs.

The errant Elaine is caught, tied, and suspended in the dungeon by her arms after this escapade. Johnny quips, "So you liked your little bath." In the midst of this conflict, *Olga's House of Shame* doesn't forget to deliver the potent dungeon scenes that the audience expects. When Olga tires of a belly dancer, she affixes her to an X-cross and forces an eyemask on her. There's also the requisite electroshock torture in the electric chair, a device that the narrator explains "never leaves its victims the same."

After this initiation, Elaine becomes Olga's protégé, whipping two girls tied to a tree as the music dramatically swells. Olga has an orgy with the three girls. Curiously turned on by the change in Elaine, the seemingly homosexual Johnny puts the moves on her. Close-ups of his big liver lips loudly smooching her disgust the audience. She makes him beg for it on his knees and slaps his face, brushing him off. As Elaine surveys the outdoors, the narrator proclaims, "Now there were not one—but two!—fiendish minds at work."

In 1965, the Weiss, Mawra, and Borden team spun off another *Olga*-themed picture, *Mme. Olga's Massage Parlor*; which uses its gangster plot to show lots of women tied to health club devices, but George felt the series had run its course.

They followed it with *Chained Girls,* a film that delivered the requisite B&D scenes, but without Audrey Campbell. Stan ultimately collected the highlights of the *Olga* films and packaged them in a compilation called *Mondo Oscenita* (1966).

The *Olga* series became recognized as quintessential 42nd Street fare, and like any great icon, Olga had her pop culture emulators. The anonymously made *Olga's Dance Hall Girls* (1966) was not by the Weiss team, but rather was a blunt ripoff that appropriated the title, and there's more than a bit of Madame Olga riffing in Mary Woronov's whip-cracking performances in Warhol's Exploding Plastic Inevitable and in *Chelsea Girls.* Madame Olga also paved the way for Ginger and Ilsa, Times Square's two future bitch goddesses, who were kids when Olga was raising hell.

The three original *Olga* movies wound up having such staying power that they played for almost two decades in various 42nd Street grindhouses, showing up as old, scratchy prints on the bottom of triple bills through the end of the 1970s. Olga fans sometimes sat through each film several times, rapturously watching their innermost fantasies projected onto the giant screen before them. Even after the films went out of circulation at the close of the decade, they lived on as S&M mythology in the "Reel Torture" column of the low-heeled kink tabloid *Fetish Times.* Movie Star News, the New York film still/poster outlet founded by pinup king Irving Klaw, had an ample selection of *Olga* stills in its bondage section, and materials such as pressbooks, posters, and stills became highly prized by S&M collectors all over the globe, for whom the films had become a reference point.

By the early 1980s, producer George Weiss was incommunicado, having been hunted down over the years by too many needy fetishist nerds, all of whom wanted prints, stills, or . . . just to *talk* about it. George knew what they were about, wanted no part of them, and so retired to Miami. Later, in 1994, he was turned into a highly fictionalized character in the Hollywood movie *Ed Wood,* where he's shown giving the green light for Wood to make *Glen or Glenda.* The film depicts Weiss as a fat, cigar-chomping, William Castle–like B-movie king—quite the opposite of the frail little S&M enthusiast of real life.

Director Joe Mawra made one last obscurity, *Miss Leslie's Dolls,* which he produced under his own name, Joseph Prieto, and cast with stock players from the Olga and Findlay-Amero movies, such as Linda Boyce. While the movie had a

small release in 1972, Eurosleaze distributor World Wide Pictures acquired *Miss Leslie's Dolls* in 1977 and played it on the same circuit as their other releases *Summer Heat* and *Vanessa*—films that were more likely to play at Chinatown's grindhouse, the Canal, than on 42nd Street. Afterwards, Mawra went into the real estate business and vanished from the exploitation film world for good. Today, he still lives on Long Island, with an understandably unlisted phone number.

Stan Borden spent the 1970s in ill health and was not really active in American Film Distributing. He had suffered a few strokes, which forced him to talk out of one side of his mouth. Stan lived out the remainder of his life shuffling between Manhattan and various fat farms.

Lorraine's shrill personality and her demands for cash up front seemed fueled by a belief that everyone who had worshipped at the altar of Madame Olga was a sucker. For years, she stonewalled any theatrical revivals of the *Olga* movies or the Findlay-Amero *Flesh* trilogy. Lorraine's "my way or no way" approach to business made her impossible to deal with, and so the *Olga* films faded from view.

In 1985, however, filmmaker/distributor Radley Metzger obtained a 16mm print of *Olga's Girls* and was so taken by it that he purchased the rights to the film for his burgeoning video company, Audubon Video. This was during the era when vintage erotica was selling for up to $100 per videotape. Today, the films are readily available.

As for Madame Olga herself, Audrey Campbell made one last film, *A Woman in Love* (1970). It was a softcore soap opera by Albert Viola, who went from making understated X-rated movies to directing the cornpone classic, *Preacherman* (1971). John Amero remembers Audrey Campbell as "wonderful." "She always told me that she wanted to marry a millionaire. I told her, 'Way to go, girl!' And the last I heard of Audrey—and this is eons ago—is that she went to Florida with a *very* wealthy man."

Viva La Olga!

# two

# The Findlays and Ameros Invent the Roughie at the Globe

**The Globe was the theater that always popped up on postcards of Times Square,** since it was right where the ball dropped on New Year's Eve. The theater's looming elliptical marquee, oversized lobby posters, and reassuring location next door to Nathan's Famous Hot Dogs on Broadway between 42nd and 43rd Streets made it one of the stylistic jewels in Times Square's crown. The coagulating aroma of hot dogs, exhaust fumes, and cigarette smoke would waft from the street into the theater.

The Globe had a reliable audience of older World War II vets who preferred their celluloid fantasies to the all-too-human reality of the seedier and greedier burlesque houses. Yet because it promised a safer viewing experience than the tawdrier grindhouses elsewhere in Times Square, the Globe also drew a wide spectrum of film fans, tourists, and thrill-seeking suburbanites. As an added plus, the Globe had a big screen that made films look sharp and clear, even if prints were blown up from 16mm.

During the 1970s, the Globe became a showcase for porno-chic hits. The audience was largely quiet, not looking for trouble, and the dedicated masturbators kept to themselves at the ends of deserted rows. Upstairs from the auditorium, however, the toilets revealed the theater's slide towards dilapidation. The men's room was a three-stall affair where copies of the prostitute contact ads from *Screw* magazine littered the urine-soaked, rarely cleaned floor. This toilet became notorious as a place where porn superstars tricked with admirers for money or for pure kicks. Marc "10½" Stevens would approach bewildered nerds

Lem and John Amero making *Body of a Female*. (John Amero Collection)

with a smooth "Hi" and a welcoming hand motion directing them to the toilet stall.

But during its 1960s heyday, the Globe was ***the*** premier showcase for the amazing sexploitation innovations of New York's hometown boy, Mike Findlay. Mike was a big, bearish, likeable guy from the predominantly Irish Yorkville section of Manhattan's Upper East Side. His early years were the complete stereotype of Catholic repression, with attendance at parochial school and a drunken nun aunt who was always around the house starting trouble. Although a late bloomer sexually, Mike started cutting school to see anything that showed a glimpse of female flesh. Mike's voyeurism and love of cinema eventually drew him to grindhouses like the Rialto and the Globe, where he was able to peek at early nudies and in the process get bitten big-time by the exploitation movie bug.

At this same time, two brothers named John Ellsworth and Lemule Firth Amero were growing up in the seaside hamlet of Gloucester, Massachusetts, a

small fishing village most famous for an old statue that commemorated sailors lost at sea. Of Portuguese descent, John and Lem grew up with their grandparents, Lemule Firth, a famous local seafarer, and Annabelle Firth, a schoolteacher. As children, both boys suffered bouts of infantile paralysis, a serious disease that served to bond the brothers emotionally.

Both brothers were gay. John was a tall, stocky, dark-haired charmer with great warmth and a wonderful sense of humor. Lem was shy, trim, lithe, and blonde. While Mike Findlay was obsessing about Rita Hayworth, John was off cutting school to peek at Stewart Granger.

After high school, John moved to Manhattan and attended NYU film school. He started his career in the early 1960s as an editor for ABC TV, where Mike was his coworker. Their intense interest in film created a close, immediate friendship. "Mike and I met at ABC doing tedious program editing," recalls John. "Splicing commercials into 16mm prints to run in syndication. We just got to talking about movies in general. Mike was always more interested in exploitation films, perhaps because he grew up here in the city. I didn't know what an exploitation film was, because I was from a small town in New England."





Mike hooked up with Roberta, a post-beatnik Jewish chick going to City College. John recalled that "at first, they were madly in love. But it was doomed." Mike didn't realize at first that John was gay, and thought at one point that John was paying too much attention to Roberta. Mike was a jealous guy. Soon, John's brother Lem moved to Manhattan and also began working as an editor at ABC studios. Mike and Roberta fell madly in love and married. Together, the Findlays and Ameros formed a kind of group marriage that gave birth to some of the strangest and greatest exploitation films to ever play Times Square.

John remembers Mike dragging him to see some tacky films at the Globe and Rialto. One of Joe Sarno's films, *Sin You Sinners,* was considered a classic. "And we both said the same thing when we walked out: 'Jesus, we can make a better film!' So then, as we were working together, we said, 'Do you want to do this? Do you want to give this a shot?' So one thing led to another and we decided, yeah, let's form a company, let's do it. So we shot *Body of a Female* on weekends." They all acted in the film themselves, since they had almost no budget, but it was having this kind of control over all the details of production that gave the film—and others that would follow—*heart.*

From the outset, the Amero-Findlay films had storylines like no others. *Body of a Female* (1965) stars Lem Amero as a jaded sadist heir to a New England family fortune. He has a creepy drifter named Bruno (played by Mike) lure sleazy women to his mansion so he can whip and abuse them for kicks. Roberta plays a Coney Island stripper who becomes enmeshed in Lem's kinky scene. Mike winds up falling for Roberta and turning on Lem. Lem hunts them down, he and Mike struggle on the beach, and Mike drowns Lem in the surf.

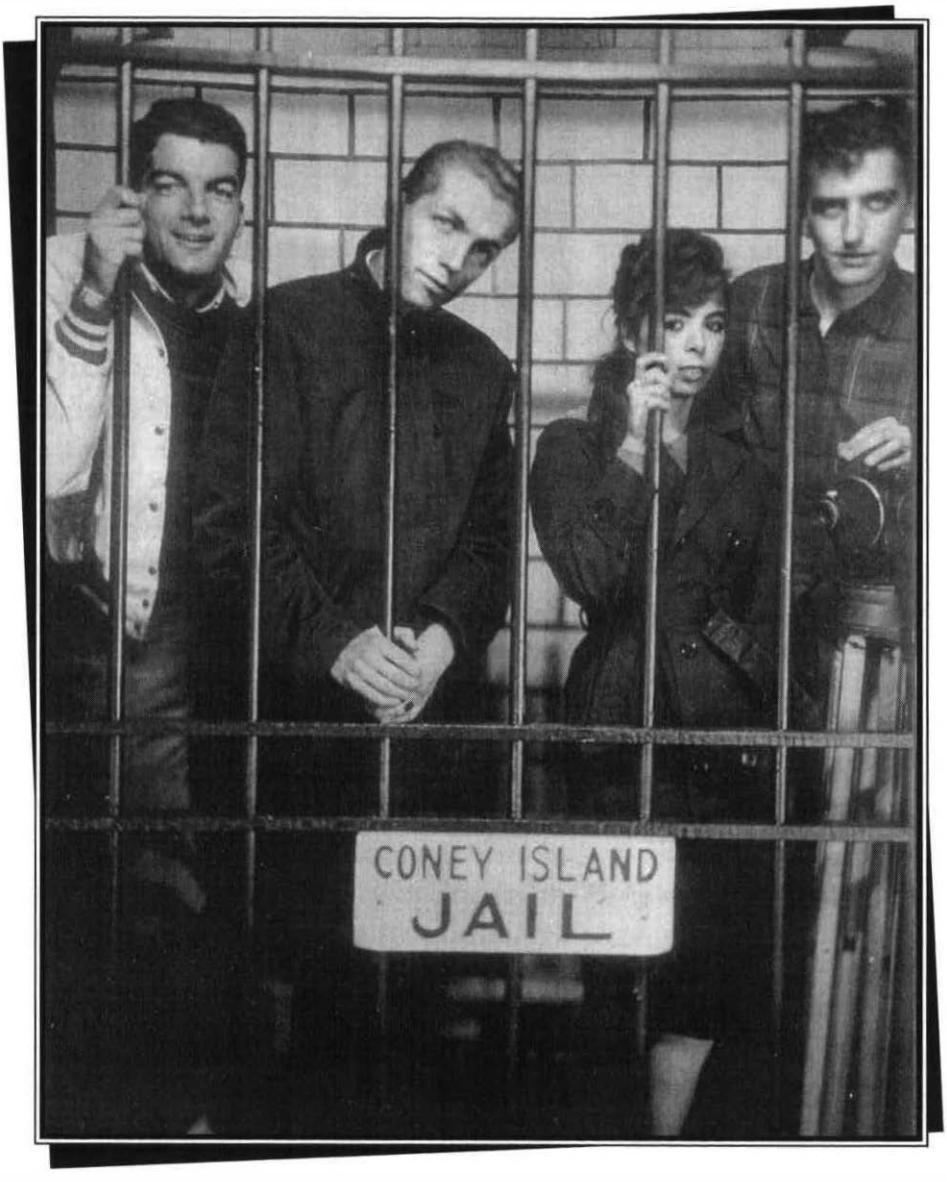
John Amero recalls, "We shot *Body of a Female* on the weekends in Coney Island. We did a little shooting on the Wonder Wheel and on the beach. We knew *nothing*. I mean we both loved filmmaking but didn't have a camera. We bought a 35mm wind-up. You could only shoot one-minute takes. And it's funny, you would think with one-minute takes that the film would move with this incredible pace but it's deadly. It's *deadly* slow. I mean cut, cut, cut, cut, cut."

The credits of *Body of a Female* list a Bettie Page, but John Amero notes, "There is no Bettie Page in the film. Maybe the name on the credits is Mike's in-joke or something. Michael adored her face. Mike was absolutely influenced by the old Klaw style. He was very influenced by burlesque. We'd make trips to famous burlesque houses—the more of a throwback to the heyday the better. We went to the Stork in Philly. It was a real throwback: rotting velvet drapes, baggy-pants comics, headliners like Blaze Starr and Tempest Storm."

John and Mike went about the daunting business of selling their first movie to a distributor who'd steal the least from them. John recalls, "We got Joe Brenner to pick it up for distribution. We only knew two distributors at the time. We read them off the bottom of the posters around Times Square. Will Mishkin and Joe Brenner. They were all over Broadway. They were the kings of exploitation at that time."

"We showed it to Mishkin first. We rented a screening room and invited him. He looked at it and he said, 'Now, I admire you guys for doing it. All these guys *say* they're gonna do it, but nobody actually *does* it and *you guys* went out and *did* it. But it needs too much work.' He made us an offer that was *so low*. He did make us an offer though. His figure barely paid for the cost of the film. We passed on it. *Body of a Female* cost between $6,000 and $7,000. Mike put up half and I put up half. And that was taken out of our weekly salaries."

"So we went off to Brenner. You would always say it cost more than it did. We




The exploitation four: (l-r) John Amero, Lem Amero, Roberta Findlay, Mike Findlay. (John Amero Collection)

told Brenner it cost $15,000 to make and he thought it looked pretty good. Brenner liked it a lot and he said, 'I won't give you a dime up front, but I want things changed. I'll give you money to shoot one more sequence. Then we'll draw up a 60-40 distribution contract.' I'm saying to Mike, 'Look, should we trust this guy?' And

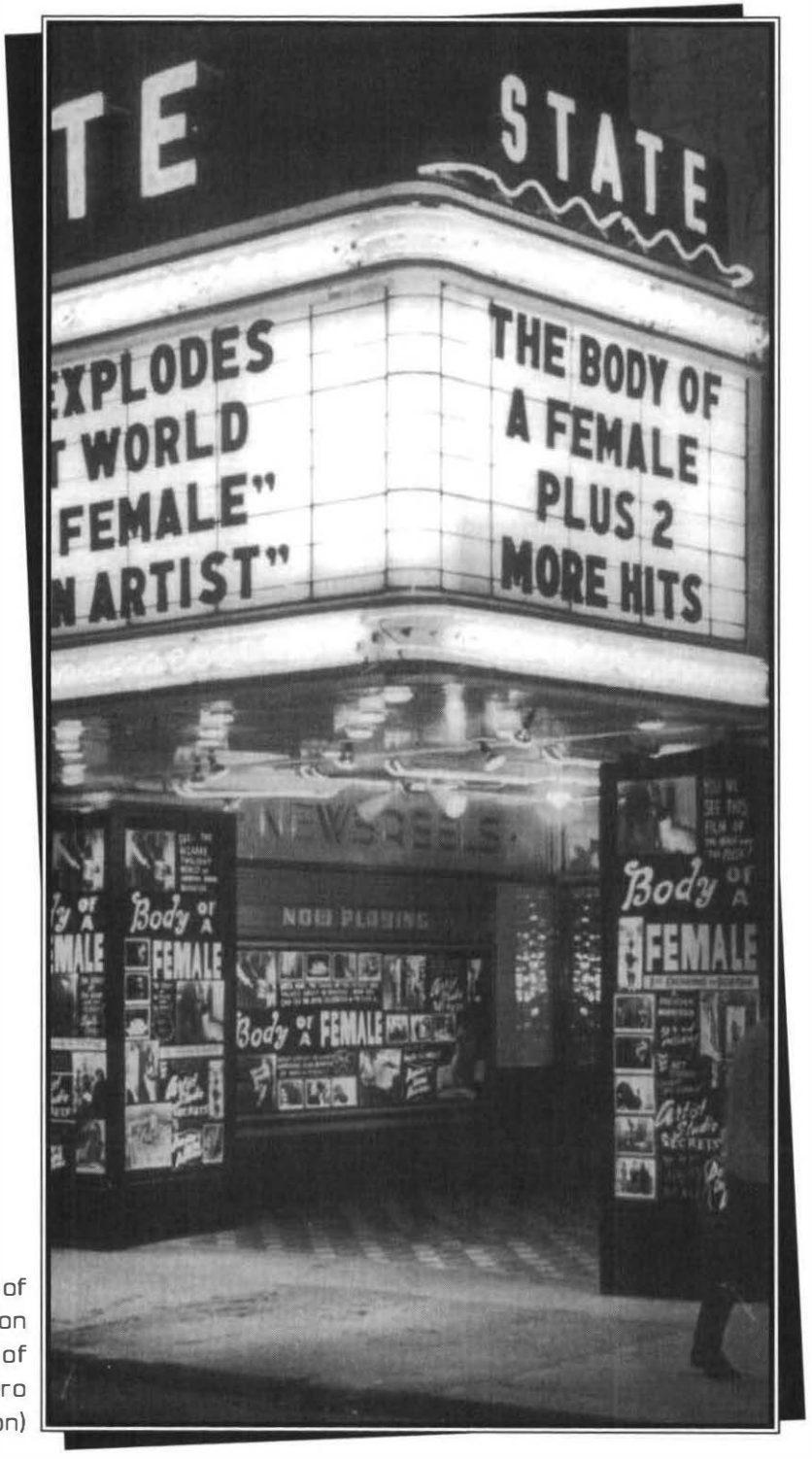
Brenner was promising us the moon and all that. But we decided to go with him because we didn't know anyone else. We signed contracts and Brenner went to work and made this elaborate pressbook. Mike said, 'He's serious; we could probably make some money off this.' Meanwhile, some of his films were playing around town and were getting some very long lines."

Bit by the exploitation bug, John left his tedious ABC day gig and went to work managing a Trans-Lux theater. The Trans-Lux chain also owned the State Theater in Boston, which was an exploitation house. John knew the manager there, who supplied him with the actual grosses of *Body of a Female*. "And they were doing a phenomenal amount of business!" John thought, "My god, if Brenner doesn't screw us royally on our percentage we could recoup the cost of this film merely through a run at the Globe or the Rialto or the State theaters!"

"I loved to have our picture playing at the Globe," says John. "It was right there on Broadway, it was the best corner—that and the Rialto. I always had a special place in my heart for the Rialto 'cause that's where all the big exploitation films were. So those were the best two houses. *Big* marquees. And you made a lot of money. Those were real movie houses, not little shoeboxes like the Doll. There was a big house in Chicago, too. We'd begin to find out about these houses, like the Little Theater in Newark, New Jersey, the Studio Theater in Philly. We'd go to Newark to check out the business on the films, we'd count heads. So, after about six months of distribution, getting statements and all this, everything was fine."

Brenner, however, soon started underreporting the film's grosses in the monthly statements. He left out theaters where Mike and John knew *Body of a Female* had played. John said to Mike, "Why don't we sell out? I think he'd like to buy us out. Why don't we see what he would give us?" "At this point," says John, "the film had a long way to go as a boxoffice draw. Mike and Roberta said 'No.' So I sold my half of the films and I think I got like $8,000 or something. And I said that's great, 'cause I had already made money on it. Mike and Roberta would say, 'You're crazy!' Perhaps that's true, but I was anxious to get going and do something more. So that was probably the end of our relationship. But we remained friends to the end and we worked on other things together. Our lives were always intertwining."

While John and Lem formed their own company, they continued to collaborate with Mike and Roberta, who found patronage through Stanley Borden, head of American Film Distributing. Stan was having enormous box office success with




The aesthetic of the exploitation lobby: a work of art. (John Amero Collection)

the roughie genre, particularly his dominatrix classics, the *Olga* series (see chapter 1). They were smash hits at nascent Times Square roughie grindhouses like Chelly Wilson's Cameo Theater on 44th Street and 8th Avenue. After *Body of a Female* made a mint for Joe Brenner, Stan was willing to give Mike and Roberta a chance to follow up on the *Olga* success story.

The Findlays' initial venture for Stan, *Take Me Naked* (1966), is as visually and atmospherically stylish. An opening scene of Mike Findlay walking through throngs of drunks on the rain-drenched Bowery sets the grim existential tone. Findlay-Amero regular Kevin Sullivan is gaunt and bearded here as a wino who stews about his undiscovered genius. The soundtrack includes Mike reading aloud from the work of Pierre Louys, the filthy French poet fond of scat, while he peeks at Roberta, the exhibitionistic drunk across the way from his SRO room. When Mike passes the bottle to Kevin, the latter interprets good will as a homosexual pass, and he kills Mike. By the end, Kevin is so delusional that he brings what he thinks is a bouquet of roses—actually a knife—to Roberta's apartment. There, he ties her arms to a bed frame as he fucks her corpse. For 1965, it's a shocking necro tableau.

Subsequently, the Findlays brought in the Ameros as collaborators for the epochal *Flesh* series. Backed by Stan's financing, distribution, and outstanding lurid ad campaigns, the Findlays and Ameros reshaped and rethought the roughie genre, bringing it to its zenith as an art form.

Mike directed and edited the films, Roberta did the photography, and the Ameros were assistant directors and production managers. They all continued to appear in the films. Mike was always the lead. Roberta did everything from voice-overs to playing floozies and masochistic victims. Roberta's female co-stars were one-shot transient strippers who generally disappeared after the filming. Mike essentially wrote the films, although some scenes are semi-improvised. The Amero brothers turn up in offbeat cameos.

Mike and Roberta were the abnorm in that they were a married couple that made extreme, sexually motivated movies. Veteran actor Jamie Gillis remembers Mike as pleasant and easygoing: "Mike played out his obsessions in his films. He wasn't the type to go around slaughtering innocents." Gillis found the Amero Brothers "genuinely sweet and decent. The reason the brothers were so well liked is that they seemed to genuinely love what they were doing. They loved movies."

In the mid-1960s, it was far from socially acceptable to be connected to "dirty" movies, so the Findlays and Ameros employed a slew of pseudonyms. Mike was usually known as Julian Marsh or Robert West, Roberta as Anna Riva. John Amero acted under the name John Ellie. When Mike and John collaborated on a particular task, they used the name Francis Ellie, a combination of their respective middle names of Francis and Ellsworth. Lem took the unlikely moniker Firth DeMule. "Firth" from Lem's real-life middle name and "DeMule" from the childhood nickname with which John had saddled him (deriving from his full first name, Lemule).

The aesthetic pinnacle of the Findlay-Amero collaborations was the infamous *Flesh* trilogy. Stan Borden recalled that the *Flesh* pictures didn't play as widely as the *Olga* series, but they did "pretty good. We saved a lot of theaters from going out of business with those. I've made a *lot* of money with them." John Amero remembers, "Our films played the best two houses, the Rialto and the Globe, on 42nd Street and Broadway, which were part of the Bingo Brandt chain. After they'd play there, they'd move over to 8th Avenue, to theaters like the Cameo." John and Mike loved seeing their own films in Times Square and watching ticket buyers line up and enjoy them as well. Good times.



The credits of *The Touch of Her Flesh* (1967) are light projections on objectified parts of a nude female. Weapons expert Richard Jennings (Mike Findlay) ominously shoots a crossbow at a dartboard. His bleach-blonde floozy wife lies on the couch. "I'll miss you, Claudia," he says wistfully as he leaves on a business trip. "I'll call you."

From afar, we see Jennings make his way through the dismal Port Authority Bus Terminal. He phones his wife for a last-minute tender good-bye, but she's already in the arms of her part-time lover Steve (Ron Skideri, an actor friend of the Ameros who's billed as "Steve West"), who strikes many dramatic shirtless poses of macho passion. Jennings is afraid something's wrong and goes back home, where he learns the truth, his morbidly angry face filling the screen. Hurt beyond belief, he runs away, tearing down East Houston Street past Ratner's Deli. (One of the great things about the Findlay/Amero movies is that they're a pristine time capsule of New York at a specific point in the 60s, as much as any Phil Spector song.)

Suddenly, Jennings is struck by a car. He wakes up in the hospital, his head

swathed in bandages. He's lost an eye. The laconic doctor points out that he'll be crippled *for a while.*

Now all alone in the world, sporting an eyepatch and stuck in a wheelchair, Jennings rolls himself around his shithole tenement apartment, guzzling Old Crow and stewing about his goddam no good wife's cheating. His mind becomes unhinged. A revenge plot begins to brew. "The first shall receive a rose . . . this symbol of her once virginity . . . will slay the whore," he declares as he lies on a cot, trying to make sense of it all.

The monologue is shattered by wild bikini-and-white-lipstick go-go dancing under a spinning mirrorball. The garage rock song "Right Kind of Lovin' " blasts over the soundtrack (and would turn up in later *Flesh* pictures). A ska/reggae-flavored instrumental follows as a black stripper gets herself together in a dressing room. Superficially, the scene looks like one of those loops sold in the back of old detective magazines, but the lyrical composition renders it more like a Ken Anger featurette for heterosexuals.

Jennings's poisoned rose is delivered to the stripper's dressing room. Admiring the bud, she touches the stem. A thorn pricks her. She sucks at her thumb, but it's too late. As she begins her number on stage, the poison begins its lethal work. Jennings watches intently, anticipating the results of his twisted handiwork. The black stripper collapses and dies on stage.

Claudia has been staying at her painting studio since Richard's accident, in a house surrounded by barren trees. Big-titted, beehive-crowned Janet—Claudia's model, pal, and sometime lover—arrives. Claudia fears for her life. She tells Janet that she's certain Richard wants to kill her for the trouble she's caused.

Jennings, still unhinged, wheels himself up to yet another burlesque house, leers at its posters, and rolls himself in. He watches the bumps and grinds through his one very wet good eye. The dancing comes to an abrupt halt when Jennings casually reaches into his pocket, retrieves a blowgun, and kills her with a poisoned dart.

At this point, Jennings is out to kill anyone Claudia has come in contact with. He spies on Janet meeting a hooker friend on a bench. When Janet leaves, Jennings wheels up to the hooker, who agrees to go home with him. "I don't need any help. Undress yourself," he disgustedly directs her. She undulates on the bed as Jennings lumbers over with a cane. He fondles her, and then demands to know

Claudia's whereabouts. "Tell me or I'll kill ya!" She tells him but he stabs her anyway.

Claudia toys with Janet's beehive as calming classical violin music fills the air. Their serenity is shattered as Jennings limps into the scene. He's finally made it out of that wheelchair, and is lumbering towards Claudia like the Frankenstein monster.

Claudia shouts to Janet, "Run! Run! It's Richard! He's crazy! Run!" Jennings grabs Claudia by the throat, but lets her live long enough to torture her to death with a circular saw.

Janet, clad only in her white nylon industrial-strength 50s bra and panty girdle set, runs like hell. She takes hold of a curiously handy crossbow and, in the last scene, shoots Jennings—dead?

Part of *Touch*'s greatness lies in Mike's go-for-broke performance as the murderous, sexually obsessive Jennings, which he delivers in his inimitably low-class New Yawk accent. Mike elaborates on the Jennings character in the group's next outing, *The Curse of Her Flesh* (1968), playing him in an even more exaggerated and off-kilter manner. Crowned by an overgrown, barely controlled mop of hair, Mike sneers, leers, sexually menaces, and bullies. His performance is in line with the tone of the film. While *Touch* is composed of long silent passages, *Curse* contains verbal boxing matches between Jennings and everyone he meets. *Touch* is like a good Miles Davis album, lyrical and fluid, while *Curse* is more of the Ornette Coleman school, taking discordant notes and forging its own angular riffs from them.

*Curse* opens with a grizzled stripper onstage doing an overamped bump-and-grind, performing quick, unspeakably vulgar nipple-tugging and propping her scant breasts atop a hardback wooden chair. The credits appear over images of a men's room filled with glory holes and graffiti (including self-referential scrawls like "42nd and 8th" and "Lem eats blue film"). Steve—Claudia's lover in *Touch*—takes a long, audible piss. Whereas *Touch* depicted Jennings's revenge on his adulterous wife, *Curse* dramatizes his fixation on her lover.

Jennings sits before a dressing room mirror, applying a fake beard. Roberta's New Yawkese honks out a news report on the transistor radio, revealing that police are searching for the madman Jennings, who's still on the lam. She narrates a reprise of *Touch*'s highlights. Jennings smirks.

Mike Findlay on the attack as his alter-ego Richard Jennings: "Where's Claudia? Tell me or I'll kill ya!" (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection, courtesy Something Weird Video and Distribpix, Inc.)

Now sporting a phony beard and full-tilt psychosis, Jennings hobbles around the basement of a burlesque theater, leaning on a sword cane. He's been reduced to hiding out as the theater's porter. Steve asks him directions to the men's room.

"I've been working in this theater a long time," Jennings leers, "and you know where the *real* show is—in the men's room. One time I went down there and there were four men in one stall with their pants down. And you know what they asked me? To join them," he smirks.

The masochistic Jennings handles toilets and scrubs urinals. He looks at Steve through a peekhole in a stall. "I could stick you right now like the pig you are," he muses. But then, it occurs to Jennings that it would be much more fun to torture Steve to death, and create as much mayhem as possible along the way, so he sets out to learn everything he can about Steve, from his financial situation to his sexual habits, so he can make Steve's life a shambles before doing him in.

A semi-improvised scene follows. Steve sits on a stage, barren but for a table,

a half-consumed bottle of Four Roses whiskey, and a newspaper that he refers to as his "Bible." He drunkenly mumbles inanities. "I don't have a fallout shelter . . . no fallout shelter." "Right Kind of Lovin' " blasts over the soundtrack as two garter-belted, big-titted strippers flash around a bedroom in G-strings made of dollar bills. "The women have it . . . the men don't . . ." Steve muses.

Sans the fake beard, Jennings sits at a bar. He's chatting up one of the garter-belted strippers, but she won't give him the time of day until he tells her he's the owner of the burlesque house. Jennings shakes her down for info about Steve. Why would his wife have pursued him? He's nothing but an out of work actor. Or could he be a gigolo who leeches off dancers? The stripper reveals that Steve and his brother are waiting for an inheritance. She gives Jennings the come-on: "He's a crumb and you're a great guy. Let's go to my place."

Now in the stripper's apartment, Jennings applies poison to her cat's claws. "This pussy wants *meat!*" he bellows. She recoils at this outburst: "Hey! I don't like no crazy talk." Jennings throws his head back, laughs like a loon, then yanks the cat's paw out and scratches her with it. "Cut that out or I'll call the cops!" He beats it away and she collapses, dead.

The next segment made *Curse* addictive to those with an S&M bent. It's part *Teasarama* and part Irving Klaw 8mm loop. A blonde woman is tied with rope to Roman columns on a stage. Smoke machines billow. A severe looking, garter-clad model with a sharp, tight hair bun arrives armed with a large whip. She flogs the blonde woman, bloodying her entire body, including her face. The scene goes on for an extended time, with music shifting from classical to jazz to bongos, bringing the action to a full boil.

After the show, Jennings reclines on a couch in the dominatrix's dressing room. "Right Kind of Lovin' " grooves again as she dry-humps Jennings on the couch.

"Do you know what a *dildo* is?" he asks.

"A girl's best friend."

"I'm going to give you an address. You're going to do whatever you have to do and be back here for the one o'clock show!"

Jennings dispatches the hooker to a Puerto Rican dancer's apartment. As the two women share an amorous bath, the hooker uses the device. However, the dildo

has been equipped with a spring knife, which kills the unfortunate dancer. Seduction has turned to unwitting murder.

She had no idea that Jennings had sent her to kill the dancer. She demands he pay her. More strip acts ensue, from the hooker doing a 69/bondage number with the blonde masochist to a scene with the nipple jiggler from the film's opening. Jennings murders them all, along with a nosy cop who turns up at the theater looking for him.

Jennings finally sets his one good eye on Steve as his last target. It's necessary that Steve be financially well off for the machinations of Jennings's demented plot to work. To this end, Jennings ensures that Steve receives the entire inheritance by killing Steve's brother (played by John Amero) in the theater's men's room. (John hated seeing himself on a movie screen, but seems like an accomplished actor.)

Inexplicably, Jennings is next running a dirty bookstore, wearing a white visor over his unkempt hair. Steve's gotten himself a fiancée. She enters the bookstore, setting the stage for the last chapter of Jennings's warped revenge plan. He announces to her that Steve would only marry a virgin. With psychotic flourish, Jennings tells her that he knows she lost her virginity at age 12, and offers to "surgically restore" it. She thinks Jennings is nuts, but since she's got her greedy eyes set on Steve's inheritance, she acquiesces to his scheme.

The nuptials take place at a cheap motel. Classical music swells. Abstracted body parts fill the screen.

The honeymoon is interrupted by a knock at the motel room door. A special delivery package arrives. It's a stag movie called *Squash Fever,* which shows Steve's new bride masturbating with a squash. Mortified, she denies it's her. Steve, recognizing Jennings's twisted handiwork, wants to believe her—that is, until the film-within-the-film cuts to a scene of the financée having her virginity "restored" by Jennings, clad as a doctor and wielding various sharp, malevolent metal instruments.

Infuriated by his new bride's secret sexual activities, Steve shoots her. Jennings emerges from behind a chintzy divider in the room, and shouts that he's going to rip Steve's penis from his very body.

Steve flees. Jennings follows in hot pursuit, knocking over an Orthodox Jew

and stealing his car. He catches up with Steve, who's now hiding on the back of a moving flatbed truck. In a mad struggle, Jennings stabs Steve in the balls.

A postscript questions, "Is this the end of the criminal career of Richard Jennings?" Not quite: A title card promises that *Kiss of Her Flesh* will be coming soon to this theater.

Shot just a few miles from the Amero Brothers' family home in snowy Massachusetts, *The Kiss of Her Flesh* (1968) emerges as a series of frequently intense and perverse vignettes. It kicks off with Jennings picking up a Latina of a freezing, off-season beach. He abducts her, puts her in rope bondage, tortures her with a lobster claw, and finally electrocutes her through her earrings.

Jennings goes on to lock horns with a couple that prove to be his final undoing. The heroine, Maria, is Jennings's late wife's sister—another bleach-blonde in the classic Findlay tradition. After a brief lesbian encounter, Maria fucks her lanky boyfriend, Don (actor Kevin Sullivan, using the moniker "Leo Heinz"). As the music cooks to a full boil, she inserts beads into his ass and pulls them out at the climactic moment, which is garnished by a quick foray into cock voyeurism.

Insane as always, Jennings kills a hitchhiker by scorching her with a blowtorch inside a car. With the aid of a white coat, he then goes on the run, playing doctor sadist. He puts poison on his penis and forces his next victim to blow him. Sideways views of Mike Findlay's bloated and demented face fill the screen, feigning ecstasy. Quirky close-ups show the woman sucking a small object, perhaps a carrot.

When a woman bleeds to death in a bathtub from Jennings's "treatment," Don and Maria tie him to a chair. They aim a harpoon at him, attached by a string to his member: If he gets hard, the harpoon fires and he dies. The couple proceed to fuck in front of him, and Jennings fights to keep his penis limp. Close-ups of his sweating, gagged face display a mirage of the agonies of hell.

Finally, Jennings breaks free and makes a mad dash, taking off in Don and Maria's car. In a hilarious shoestring Keystone Kops chase, they grab the back bumper of their car and then fall off dramatically when the car stops short. After a wild pursuit on the deserted beach, Don tosses Jennings from a scaffold. There's one last view of Jennings, looking like a beached whale as he dies. A press-type title card announces: "POSITIVELY THE END OF RICHARD JENNINGS."

An intense study in S&M sinema as it veered towards hardcore, the *Flesh* series defined a sleazoid aesthetic for a generation of moviegoers. By the late 1970s, prints had been unavailable for years, although production stills and posters would surface in fetish-oriented outlets like Manhattan's Movie Star News. If you were too young to have seen the films, but had a distant memory of their lurid newspaper ads and posters, you had to rely on the words of elder sleazemongers, who only emphasized the severity.

John Amero comments, "It's amazing Mike and I were such close friends because I was so fun and silly and light and wanted to do comedies and Mike was this dark, very 'sex is bad, you are gonna be punished'. . . . I used to kid him all the time. So, all those scripts are Mike. But that was not his life with Roberta, certainly. Nor was it before Roberta, because I knew him then as well. But those Richard Jennings films, I used to kid him. He *loooved* it. He just loved all that dark stuff. I mean talk about exploitation noir. And they were fun to work on. It is funny we would get along so well. And yet he would never have made something so silly as what I wrote and I never would have made anything so dark and serious as *Touch of Her Flesh* or anything."

Using a loft on 22nd Street as a studio, John and Lem began making their own softcore films. They broke off their close association with the Findlays, though they continued to see each other socially and collaborate on occasional projects. John Amero recalls that, "Lem and I started out to make an exploitation film called *The Girl on Nightmare Island.* We had some footage of *Girl on Nightmare Island* and *Diary of a Swinger,* and we turned it into *The Lusting Hours.* Lem directed, primarily. Lem and I had just put our own money into *The Lusting Hours* and Stan just bought it. We made it so cheap and he offered us what I thought was a fair amount of money. He bought the film outright in two days. So we came out of that one OK. But, thinking about it now, one would never do that. But Stanley would never give you a piece of the action, anyway, with anybody."

In *The Lusting Hours* (1967), the Amero brothers use their editors' sensibilities to create a sublimely sleazy pastiche, combining old Amero-Findlay footage with a mixture of fresh sequences, from location shots to kinky new scenes. There's enough S&M to fit in with Stan Borden's other roughies like the *Olga* and *Flesh* trilogies; a mix of "socially redeeming" white-coater narration with a *Mondo Prostitution* approach to the world of sex for cash, both hetero and homosexual;

The Amero Brothers strike out on their own with their concoction, *The Lusting Hours*. (John Amero Collection, courtesy Something Weird Video and Distribpix, Inc.)

and abstract, brightly lit objectified visuals within pitch darkness, like as a close-up of Mike kissing a girl or the disembodied hands of a stripper removing her gloves. The credits list the trademark Mike and Roberta Findlay pseudonyms of Julian Marsh and Anna Riva, but the Ameros took the aesthetic leads: The movie is "supervised" by "J. Ellsworth" and "L. Firth."

*The Lusting Hours* opens with wild jazz music underscoring location shots of New York as seen from a free-flowing camera. Hysterical girls screaming out in lust for the Beatles, punctuated by repeated pans to a cardboard display of the Fab Four, centering in on Paul McCartney.

The film's first segment depicts a rural bordello, introduced with shots of the countryside and footage of Bonnie and Clyde–era cars. John Amero's narration extols the local cathouse as a socially accepted necessity in a hick town.

Inside the cathouse, Roberta is playing piano and Mike dances carefree among the revelers. Between the boozing and carousing, a wild catfight breaks out between high-heeled sluts, looking like an Irving Klaw photo sprung to life.

The Amero brothers then counter with the subversive homosexual twist that runs throughout the film. The madam prowls upstairs, where a narcissistic body-builder works out in his bedroom. She confronts him: "They say you're queer. That all you care about is your muscles." She grinds her high heel into his bare chest in a Bill Ward–like composition.

We meet a pornographer, portrayed in inimitable style by young, slim, blonde Lem Amero. Footage from 1963's *Body of a Female,* the first Findlay-Amero collaboration, carries the next segment. Lem does a deliriously twisted take on his own reality, playing a man who takes dirty photos of strippers. "What makes a pornographer?" asks his big brother John, the narrator. "A domineering mother? A family that denies the existence of sex?" Lem clicks away.

*The Lusting Hours* then supplies its own behind-the-scenes snapshots of the pornographer's private life. Lem sits mesmerized by a stripper, sipping a drink while barely containing his sadistic lust. Later, he ties her up and whips her. Lem flips through his fat wallet and hands the woman a few twenties for the session. She takes them and spits in his face, bringing the S&M victim/executioner scenario full circle.

Shots of inter-borough bridges and the Manhattan skyline introduce the movie's "Street Girls" segment. Roberta's exaggerated yenta voice is heard over a

scene of two women bathing. Roberta explains that streetwalkers are desperate and possess low IQs. As her endless monologue plays over the vaguely lewd visuals, the scene comes across as a female equivalent of the sequence in Warhol's *My Hustler* where the two hustlers share a bathroom to preen and chat about trade secrets.

*The Lusting Hours* delves into the male hustling realm, with exaggerated depictions of such typical 8th Avenue behavior as casual pickups and pickpocketing. The hustler (Ron Skideri) is first seen as the walker of an old bag. She writes him a check. He rips it up as if he couldn't *dream* of accepting cash because he's her "friend." When he rubs her shoulders, he gets a bigger check.

Seeking more cash, he goes home, changes into jeans, and cruises a toilet in the Port Authority Bus Terminal. A shot from behind a grating makes you think the cameraman snuck in there for some cinema verité, but it's actually the bathroom of the Trans-Lux West Theater, which John Amero was managing at the time. Finally, the hustler picks up a trick, whose pocket he then picks. They start making out in their underwear as the scene fades out.



The cherry on the cake and the capper to it all is the hustler's private kicks. He finally ends the circle by handing his money over to his dominant drag-queen lover, who verbally debases him, whips him, and rides him like a horse. The drag queen is played by none other than Lem Amero, with the voice-over by Mike Findlay. Chuckled John, "When Stanley found out it was Lem in drag on the poster for *The Lusting Hours,* he was, like, 'I CAN'T FUCKIN' BELIEVE IT!' "

*The Lusting Hours* wraps up with a quick replay of all the segments. It's a terrific movie, full of life, with the Findlays and the Ameros at their wildest stylistically and their most daring sexually, going full throttle and allowing the movie to reflect their imaginations in an authentic, urgent manner.

The Amero Brothers followed up with *Diary of a Swinger* (1967), their version of the archetypal "country girl goes to the big city" story. It opens as actress Joanna Cunningham is in a shrink's office, telling her tale of woe after a suicide attempt. Flashback: The girl grows up on an idyllic farm with her protective, widowed father. Ron Skideri, playing an aggressive farmhand, rapes her, and her dad rescues her in a claustrophobic butch fistfight in a haystack. This incident earns her a reputation in town, with guys asking her out expecting that she's an easy lay.

Appalled, Joanna flees to Manhattan and moves in with an older, protective lesbian roommate. She gets a secretarial job working for an agent in the theater district, where she meets an actor named Jim. They begin dating and he gives her a taste of Times Square nightlife, showcasing the Ameros' trademark 1960s nighttime scenes of Brill Buildings--era, neon-lit Broadway. Joanna flees when Jim tries to seduce her, and for a brief time works as a high fashion model for a photographer (played by Lem Amero).

Jim returns and takes her to a wild party that's as close as films of the time got to an orgy scene. Like the brothel sequence in *The Lusting Hours*, it was shot after hours in the lobby of the Trans-Lux West Theater at Broadway and 49th Street, where John was the manager. The party features strippers brought in on canapé trays carried by musclemen, a muscle-flexing display by an aged Jack La Lanne type known as "the wonder boy" (who was one of the Trans-Lux ushers), and guests eating caviar off of strippers' bodies. Throughout the proceedings, Lem Amero flits about in a cape emblazoned "SUPER DYKE." He's quickly reduced to crawling around the floor, pulling down the garments of both women and men.

Jim taunts Joanna by fucking another girl at the orgy. She goes home heartbroken, and is surprised by a burglar, who rapes her. That's the straw that breaks the camel's back. Joanna slits her wrists in the sink, but is saved by her roommate just in time. Then it's off to therapy, which is where we came in. *Diary* ends sardonically with the psychiatrist saying that Joanna has a chance of a mental health and a normal relationship with a man. She goes home, snickeringly repeats the shrink's analysis to her lesbian roommate, then gives her a passionate kiss, accepting her as a full-time lover.

While the Ameros' films dealt with outré subject matter, good reviews from trade papers like *Variety* became the norm. When they'd go home to visit, Gloucester newspapers would publish articles with headlines like "Local Brothers Make Good in the Big City"—though the articles were politely vague about the nature of the brothers' films.

The Findlays tossed off a quickie remake of *Body of a Female* they titled *The Ultimate Degenerate* (1969). This time around, Kevin Sullivan from *Kiss of Her Flesh* plays Bruno the henchman. Mike reprises Lem's role as Spencer the sadistic collector of women, only he's rolling around in a wheelchair like Richard Jennings. Although weaker than both the original film and the *Flesh* trilogy, the film

still contains many powerful moments and images: the words of the burnt-out heroine—"People are like cars: they get banged up a lot" over a pan of a wrecking yard; a cold, wintertime setting in Coney Island; the grotesque frozen pleasure-mask faces of the hooker pick-ups; and, most memorably, the menacing scenes of a shirtless, gas-mask-wearing Bruno striking an executioner's stance. *The Ultimate Degenerate* stands as Mike's depressive, terminal view of S&M, as opposed to the Amero's freer notion of sexual satire.

Between directing gigs, John Amero managed such notorious Times Square adult theaters as the Circus and the Doll. When he saw Howard Ziehm's *Mona* at the Tivoli Theater in early 1971, it was the first time a hardcore feature had been shown in New York. "It was a big screen. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I thought, 'They'll never get away with it!' The world's going to hell!"

Ziehm's *Mona* was a $7,000 weekend wonder, the erotic equivalent to Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou* in breaking taboos. It concerns a young lady who wants to remain a virgin until her wedding, but will orally oblige those she fancies. A truly subversive film, *Mona* has an incredible John Cage–like soundtrack and is a Kraft-Ebbing encyclopedia of American erotic obsessions and hangups, from incest to a meditation on the virgin whore. Its director had little realization of the impact the film would have at the time he made it. Later, he achieved fame with the perennial teen make-out drive-in überhit *Flesh Gordon.*

Just as the British Invasion finished the Brill Building's reign on the music charts, Ziehm's *Mona* spelled the end for old-style sexploitation. Although they never intended to go hardcore, and were trying to make better exploitation movies, the Findlays and Ameros had to adapt to the new times, and quickly. The Ameros had put all their money in a Fellini-style movie called *Bacchanale* (1970), which they had shot softcore. After the precedent of *Mona,* John exclaimed, "My God, what are we gonna do?" He thought the film would be unplayable. "So that's when we went looking for someone to do the inserts. And Herb Streicher [a clean-shaven, pre–*Deep Throat* Harry Reems] was the person we found. And we met Jason and Tina Russell, a Times Square live-sex-show couple. They did inserts for the couple in the film and Herb did other inserts. That one opened at the Circus Cinema because I knew the owners. So that made a lot. *Variety* reviewed it. That's when they were reviewing X-rated. It got a good review, so that was great."

Mike and Roberta reacted to the influx of hard-X by venturing into low-budget horror with opuses like *Shriek of the Mutilated* (1974). In Argentina, they shot a quickie film about a Manson-like gang. When reports of snuff films began to surface in the mid-1970s, distributor Allen Shackleton acquired the unreleased Findlay movie, tacked on a fake cinema verité scene of a camera crew dismembering an actress, and unleashed the end product under the hateful name *Snuff* (1976). One of the most notorious exploitation hoaxes ever, the picture sparked protests by Women Against Pornography that were well covered by the national news media. The controversy was exacerbated by Shackleton's comments to *Variety* that he'd be a fool to admit the movie was a hoax.

Around the same time, the Findlays became involved in a protracted, painful separation after having a child. "Mike thought having a baby would make the marriage better," says John. "My brother and I babysat a few times. Mike and Roberta eventually split up."

Stan Borden acerbically noted, "Roberta was nothing to him. She was, like, Mike's assistant, you know. His wife. That's how he used her. But I don't think she had much to do with Mike. They were breaking up all the time. Were they actually divorced? Maybe separated. I'm not really sure."

"Roberta sort of walked quietly in Mike's shadow," recalled John. "After the divorce, she became very assertive. She had learned the business and became a hardcore director." Without Mike's guiding hands, Roberta fell under Shackleton's noxious spell, and proudly billed herself as one of the first female pornographers. As partner to one of the meanest, most misanthropic men in the sex business, she wasted her talent on neurotic, sloppy, and incoherent films like *A Woman's Torment* and *Naughty Nurses*. Her shameful Shauna Grant pseudo-psychodocumentary, *Shauna: Every Man's Fantasy*, is beyond distasteful, telling the story of a porn actress who committed suicide. Roberta did get it together for one interesting hardcore film, *Angel Number 9*, about a sexist man who returns to life in a woman's body. Blake Edwards later remade the film as a dud called *Switch*.

Shackleton remained one of the most disliked individuals in the shady exploitation movie world, a professional fucker of other men's wives. As Stan Borden recalled, "The only one who made money on *Snuff* was Shackleton. Findlay never

got paid. Nobody got paid. Nobody but Shackleton. He died at the time he was running around Central Park with my wife. He had a heart attack. Just dropped dead. I never liked the guy."

John and Mike reunited cinematically using their "Francis Ellie" moniker and directed a string of hardcore films for the major gay porn distributor, PM Productions. Mike was the cameraman and codirector. As John recalled, "Mike suffered from panic attacks. I told him we could do this, make a few thousand over a weekend, but he'd have to see guys. I told him I'd bring Valium. It went OK."

These films used realistic New York locales and experienced older rough-trade performers like Mike DeMarco and George Payne. George was a strikingly handsome model whom John Amero had obsessed about since first seeing him in *Physique Pictorial* type magazines in the mid-1960s. The Mike Findlay/John Amero "Francis Ellie" movies, like *Kiss Today Goodbye* (1976), *Men Come First* (1979) and *Navy Blue* (1981), had marathon runs at the 24-hour, all-male theater The Big Top. Located on 49th Street and Broadway, the Big Top was a busy cruise joint with a hot dog stand and occasional male bodybuilding contests.



Mike created the straight grinder *Young and Wet* (1975) using the loop package format. The movie had all the requisites to be a triple-bill replay: a generic title, one 55-minute reel, a constant flow of hardcore action, and familiar location shots to comfort the audience.



*Young and Wet* affords Mike Findlay fans a view of this exploitation visionary after he's been through divorce, the *Snuff* debacle, and the experience of co-directing gay hardcore classics with John. The movie opens with Mike, a little grayer, a lot more jaded, yet still vigorous and sardonic, telling us he needs to get out of town. He heads to his editing room, which is garnished with posters from 60s roughies. A masked intruder busts in and demands to see what "Richard Jennings"—Mike's old *Flesh* persona—has filmed.

This premise knits together the hardcore sex loops that constitute the bulk of the movie. There's good old-time hotel room balling featuring women with that early 60s *Touch of Her Flesh* flair—a mass of big tits, stiletto heels, and garter belts. The women perform lots of erotic cock manipulation as the action gets going. Everything is set to an incredible soundtrack, a sampling of every kind of grinder music from acid rock to sexy sax to spastic jazz.

Bursts of Mike's hilarious narration punctuate the music and comment on

the segments as he turns each situation into a raunchy hooker anecdote with blurbs like "pounding pricks and pussies in the penultimate pulchritude." Mike also intercuts great footage of Times Square in 1975. You get a walking tour of the Deuce, with the marquees of adult houses like the Victory and Rialto hovering above, where hardcore classics like *Story of Joanna* and *Illusions of a Lady* are playing. A self-congratulatory shot highlights Mike's own *Snuff,* playing the National Theater on 44th and Broadway. *Young and Wet* highlights a famous loop of John Holmes and three women, a bit of footage that showed up in several 8th Avenue grinders.

After viewing the footage with Jennings, the unwelcome masked guest declares that Jennings will never be allowed to abuse another woman again, and shoots him to death in front of a poster of *Olga's House of Shame.* The Depression-era tune "42nd Street" plays as Mike dies looking up at the poster, a nod both to his obsession with Times Square and to the *Olga* movies he loved.

*Young and Wet* is Mike Findlay's most self-referential and imaginative hardcore film, a must for his fans and the ultimate example of 8th Avenue grindhouse fare. Watching it is like sitting in the Venus Theater balcony.

Anxious to leave pornography behind and pursue his career in legitimate exploitation movies, Mike developed a new 3-D process and went to Taiwan to shoot 3-D kung fu movies. "He'd write to me all the time from Taiwan," recalls John. "The last time I saw Mike," says Jamie Gillis, "he was really up on hypnotism. It made him lose his fear of flying. And we all know what happened after that." In 1977, en route to a show of his 3-D work at the Cannes Film Festival, Mike was killed in a helicopter accident atop the roof of Manhattan's Pan Am Building. Stan Borden called him "the guy who really brought 3-D back. If he had lived, 3-D would have probably been a big thing because he had a lot of new ideas on how to do it. And he died. That's it for that."

Mike Findlay remains an inspiration to low-budget filmmakers, an idol of sleazemongers, and one of exploitation's best, most dedicated and imaginative, and most missed talents. Roberta, on the other hand, went on to direct the cheap, boring exploitation mess *Tenement* in 1985. She has met any questions about her work in the 1960s roughies with open hostility, and used to brush off inquiries about the films with, "Ask the Bordens."

The Ameros continued on their own path. In the early 1980s, John and Lem

made the midnight cult movie *Blonde Ambition,* shooting it in hard-X, soft-X and R-rated versions. Before his death from AIDS in 1989, Lem Amero worked steadily as a production manager for big-budget pornographer Chuck Vincent, who also made a practice of shooting softcore versions of his films for foreign and cable markets.

Today, John Amero is still active in film production, acting as line producer for cable shows and directing infomercials. He recently produced the indie film *Speed and Absinthe,* starring Parker Posey. A true *Sleazoid* spirit, John still adores exploitation movies, and misses the whole 42nd Street neon hubbub: going to screenings, socializing with other directors and actors, visiting grindhouses like the Globe, taking a snapshot of his friend Ron Skideri's image on the billboard for *Ginger* above the DeMille Theater. "It was just so much fun."

# three

# Bloodthirsty Butchers at the Lyric: Times Square's Militant Auteur, Andy Milligan

**The Lyric Theater was smack in the center of 42nd Street, on the north side** between 7th and 8th Avenues—coming out of its doors, you'd bump into the other Deuce grindhouses whether you went left, right, or crossed the street. Looking like a doppelganger of its neighbor, the Selwyn Theater, it was one of the street's most popular venues, offering many enjoyable flourishes: a spacious lobby sporting a huge display of stills and posters, a big screen, a clear sound system, and a dramatically steep balcony with a view of the entire theater. The comfy seats were periodically reupholstered, which made the Lyric cozier than many of its neighbors.

The theater combined the most popular exploitation films on the Deuce with Hollywood hits and attracted people who wanted to be left alone to enjoy some cheap entertainment: young white guys in windbreakers from the boroughs, black professional Deuce criminals taking a break from picking pockets or conning tourists, inner city denizens wanting to escape overcrowded tenements, older people from nearby Hell's Kitchen. Nobody was looking for trouble. Neither threatening nor inviting, the Lyric was the archetype of the faceless funhouse, a metronome of normalcy in a chaotic place.

As with most of the better grindhouses, the Lyric had a hot dog stand in back. The theater was air-conditioned during the summer—"by refrigeration," proclaimed a sign hanging off the marquee—which made it a welcome relief from the sweltering street outside. During the winter, though, it was freezing—by nature, the grindhouses' cavernous structures couldn't retain heat. There was little insulation.

A film called *Bloodthirsty Butchers* was a frequent replay at the Lyric. A threadbare version of *Sweeney Todd* that first appeared in 1970, it kicked around for years, and the Lyric audience always got a charge out of its aggressive, insistently mean tone and jack-in-the-box gore scenes. When *Sweeney Todd* itself opened as a Broadway play in the late 1970s, *Bloodthirsty Butchers* played at the Lyric one chilly Friday night, with the same title slapped on as a draw for a less affluent theater district crowd. As sadistic Sweeney is about to slit the throat of an unlucky customer in his barber's chair, a bad splice appeared and the film jumped—the gore scene had been chopped out by its distributor to get the film an official MPAA "R" rating. The Lyric didn't generally attract troublemakers, but the audience had loved this film in its uncut version, and felt cheated out of its gruesome kicks. The crowd became agitated. Suddenly, a small refrigerator was hurled from the balcony, hitting the screen amid a mass of jeers, laughs, and boos.

The cranky Popeye auteur responsible for *Bloodthirsty Butchers* and many other classic Lyric Theater retreads was Andy Milligan. More than any exploitation director, Andy was a product of Times Square. He lived there, worked there, made films about life there, and entertained many a grindhouse denizen living it. In every possible sense, Andy reeked of the Deuce.

Andy was extraordinarily prolific, with a career that spanned twenty-five incredible movies. During his peak in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Andy turned out a finished film *every other month*. Andy was a penniless prince, the one-man-band of the ultra-low-budget movie, doing everything himself: directing, scripting, creating character roles, editing, and assembling the music tracks from his own scratchy record collection. He even took care of the negative cutting, a process so tedious and mechanical that most filmmakers delegate it to a lab. But not Andy. He filmed many of his movies with his 16mm Bolex camera, which was little more than a home movie camera. Lacking through-the-lens capabilities, its viewfinder captured only an approximation of what would end up on screen; the finished product was the world seen through Andy's misanthropic peekhole.

Andy's movies are, in fact, barely more than home movies. He claimed they cost between $3,000 and $20,000 to make, but those figures are actually inflated to include Andy's own salary and to squeeze more money out of the producer/distributor—realistically, they probably only cost between $750 to $3,000.

Andy adopted the garment district "I can give it to you wholesale" mentality,

which is apt considering that when he first arrived in New York he'd designed dresses in that haggardly low rent section of Manhattan. The "wholesale" deal was actually how the garment merchant profited. Andy's ultra-low budgets were, in reality, a shell game he played on himself, which unintentionally made him the mark as he faced a constant Sisyphean battle to make the next production cheaper than the last. How could he cut corners *this* time?

If Herschell Gordon Lewis (see chapter 6) could make a *Blood Feast* for $10,000, Andy believed he could go the extra mile and deliver three films for the same price in the same amount of time. He designed all his own costumes, using loud colors like fire-engine reds and hot pinks so they wouldn't wash out when they were blown up to 35mm. If anyone ever gave Andy a decent budget, the film would wind up having the same home-movie look, with much of the cash actually winding up in Andy's pocket.

But the man ultimately loved making movies. They were his drug and his reason for living. He'd beg, borrow, fuck women he hated, strike deals with despicable distributors—anything to get the money to make them. His films were pieces of himself, his whole world.

Andy is best known to his fans for gore horror movies like *Bloodthirsty Butchers* (1970) and *The Man with Two Heads* (1972), which are penny-dreadful adaptations of *Sweeney Todd* and *Dr. Jeckyll*, respectively, and *The Ghastly Ones* (1968) and *Torture Dungeon* (1970), which are set in ye olde England but were shot in the suburban New York borough of Staten Island. However, Andy's greatest talent was as a tenderloin filmmaker; his best movies remain his sexploitation films, which reflect the multiplicity of sexual variants that he observed, studied, and experienced in Times Square. They're as base, authentic, and revealing as men's room graffiti. The only time his horror movies become interesting is when their sublimated sexual undercurrent breaks through their ridiculous costumes and period settings.

Andy Milligan was born an Army brat in Indiana, and his early life reflects all the dysfunction of military life. It hurt Andy deeply that as an officer's kid he couldn't play with the enlisted men's children. Andy was also the victim of the U.S. military's habit of ignoring the mental health of its dependents. His mother was an alcoholic and literally insane. He despised her, and consequently never drank or used drugs in his life.

During World War II, Andy joined the navy and "had a good time." After the war he hung out in Hollywood with pioneering gay director Kenneth Anger during the latter's *Fireworks* period. In the early 1950s Andy migrated to New York City to pursue acting. He landed some TV and theater work but worked in the garment district to pay his bills. His sewing skills later came in handy when he was designing the near-absurd period costumes for his horror movies.

By the 1960s, Andy had enmeshed himself with the bohemian downtown theater crowd, writing and directing plays for the Caffé Chino, a post-beatnik, pre-freak, off-Broadway theater where creativity ruled and art was encouraged. A few of the personalities buzzing around the Chino were Warholites Ronald Tavel and Mary Woronov; Tom O'Horgan and Jerome Ragni, who put on their infamous play *Futz* about a man in love with a pig at the Chino before graduating to Broadway with *Hair;* and Manhattan's theatrical lighting man and pot dealer extraordinaire Johnny Dodd, who was the busboy. This theater background experience lent Andy the shoestring Tennessee Williams quality that would run through his films.



At the Caffé Chino, Andy cultivated a bunch of hothouse flowers who gradually blossomed into his stock company, including actors like Hope Stansbury and Hal Borske. Andy usually typecast the unattractive Hal as a hunchback or retard in his horror films like *Torture Dungeon* and *The Ghastly Ones.* These characters would often meet a fiery end. "Hal was such a delight to set on fire," Andy would recall, chuckling. Hal's brother John collaborated with Andy on many scripts.

In 1962 Andy made his first film, *Vapors.* He'd ramble on about its significance as an underground film: "It was before Andy Warhol or *Scorpio Rising*!" In the 1960s, some of the more explicit and accessible underground films, particularly Anger's *Scorpio* and Warhol's *My Hustler,* crossed over into the commercial sexploitation arena by playing Times Square adult houses. However, *Vapors* has little in common with Warhol's cinema verité or Anger's expressionism other than its blunt depiction of male homosexuality. The film is in the "photographed play" style of *The Brig* or *The Connection,* but springs to life more cinematically, using terse visuals and great verbal shock value to depict a sexual underworld.

*Vapors* had its initial premiere at the small Bridge Theater in the East Village, next to the St. Marks Baths, where the film was actually set. That beat getting stuck à the penniless downtown underground venues controlled by Jonas Mekas, where the film would have been left both obscure and vulnerable to an ob-

scenity bust à la *Flaming Creatures*—a situation that would only crush the filmmaker while furthering Mekas's agenda and fame. But in any case, *Vapors* was a bad fit for the homosexually dominated underground milieu, since it's ostensibly about a straight man's troubles. The film eventually moved up to Times Square adult houses like the Cameo, where it played on and off until 1973, way after the arrival of hardcore.

The distribution and Deuce success of *Vapors* initiated Andy's many beefs with the bottom drawer of exploitation distributors. Chelly Wilson's Variety Films distributed the film. But Phil Todero, who worked for Chelly managing the Eros Theater, got his hands on the print. Todero was a bewigged old queen, a true piece of 8th Avenue debris who acted as Chelly's front man even while baldly skimming off of her on the side. Todero was so low that, in the 1980s, he was even stealing $50 from each of the Eros's male dancers' pathetic $125 weekly pay envelopes. Andy would fume that Todero made money off of San Francisco showings of *Vapors*, where it played as a gay cult film through to the mid-1980s. Long before the movie was released on tape, Todero was selling video bootlegs for $100 a copy to film collectors out of the Eros box office.

Within its natural Times Square environment, *Vapors* played as a featurette one-reeler since it ran a brief 35 minutes. One-reelers hark back to the "square-up reel" of roadshow days, which showed raw sexual footage that the main features sometimes lacked, thus ensuring that the audience got their money's worth. The one-reelers of the 60s tended to be seriously kinky. To promote *Vapors*, Variety Films designed a teaser trailer showing stills from the movie. Old-fashioned lettering against a theater curtain declared the film "a realistic depiction of the homosexual lifestyle" made by "the new master of underground film, *Andy Milligan*."

*Vapors* opens as Andy's hand-held camera bounces along inside a nighttime Manhattan crosstown bus. Its focus is on Thomas, a skinny young queen with thinning blonde hair, wearing a business suit. The shaky credits unfold. Thomas is played by Andy's sometime lover and collaborator, Gerard Jacuzzo. Gerry produced and edited *Vapors* under the pseudonym Gerald Jackson, and a few of his other familiar pseudonyms appear as well: costumes by "Raffine," settings by "Dick Fox." The script is credited to Andy's theater crony and sometime horror film star, Hope Stansbury.

Thomas anxiously gets off the bus at St. Marks Place. Andy's Bolex transforms the dark street into flickers of neon light against a black universe. The prominent image is a glowing "BATHS–DAY–NITE" sign heralding the St. Marks Baths, where the action unfolds.

Thomas looks over his shoulder and enters the bathhouse. The *City of Night*--era butch clerk tells him it's $3.50 admission instead of the $2 he expected. It's a Friday night—weekend rate. The clerk also seals Thomas's valuables in an envelope because he notes, "You can't even trust your mother these days, how'dya expect to trust a bunch of queens?" Indeed.

Thomas enters a flimsy room riddled with graffiti like "DIKE" and bad cock-and-balls drawings. He undresses and puts on a cheap, soiled white bathrobe wrap. A group of pre-Stonewall queens are in the bathhouse, camping and cruising. One rejects the skinny Thomas for lack of muscles. Another, played by a young Hal Borske, thoughtfully advises Thomas to keep his door open wider to attract a trick.



A troubled man with a pompadour politely yet insistently enters Thomas's room. He introduces himself as Mr. Jaffee (Robert Dahdah), a curiously formal greeting for such an anonymous cruise joint. Thomas thinks he's a kindly straight guy out to explore his homosexual tendencies. He seems positively genteel compared to the insulting, ego-destroying queens populating the bathhouse. But appearances are deceiving, and Thomas becomes the passive, willing partner in a twisted, verbally driven kink session.



Like Thomas, Mr. Jaffee is dressed in a bathrobe with a "St. Marks Baths" logo that one of Andy's cast members had lifted during a week of nightly bathhouse visits. Mr. Jaffee says it's his first time at the baths, and that the steam made him feel clean "inside and out." He accuses Thomas of not enjoying the steambath, and Thomas replies that he frequents baths so often they're like bathing at home. Playing the he-virgin, Mr. Jaffee inquires, "How can you get to *know* somebody here?," then complains of having been ignored when walking through the steam room earlier. "This is an insane asylum for mad homosexuals," he notes, shrugging his shoulders with a mix of a harrumph and a chuckle.



Thomas becomes paranoid that they're being watched, so Mr. Jaffee stuffs paper into a glory hole in the wall, then leaves to get them something to drink. At this point the insulting queen who originally rejected Thomas as "too skinny" en-

ters the room. "May I touch your skin?" "Please don't," Thomas recoils. "My friend will be back." "I didn't know you were hung up on him. I wouldn't even make it with *him,*" the queen limpwristedly bitches back.

Mr. Jaffee returns from the hallway soda machine with 7-Up and a Coke. Unfamiliar with this chivalrous attention, Thomas can't decide which to take. So in a startlingly forward Daddy gesture, Mr. Jaffee hides the cups behind his back, thrusts his groin out, and tells Thomas to pick an arm.

Warming up to Thomas's gentleness, Jaffee admits that he came to the baths to get away from his wife, Isabella. He says his marriage has been stuck in the same boring routine for the past nineteen years, then goes into a tirade of complaints, most of them hinting at female dominance and dirty sex. Isabella goes out at night, leaving his dinner in cellophane for him to eat alone when he comes home from work. She treats him no better than a dog. He can't fuck her because she wears curlers, a hairnet, and a face full of cold cream to bed. "She's so vain," he snipes.

Occasionally, the scene cuts to shots from outside the room, glimpsing giddy queens eavesdropping on the couple, and relating "Get-You Mary" anecdotes, from "I saw her at a drag ball last week!" to a hilarious story about a trick's false teeth falling out during a blow job.

Mr. Jaffee then starts admiring Thomas's feet. "Can I do something?," he asks. Thomas, curious, acquiesces, and Mr. Jaffee takes his foot in hand and recites "this little piggy" as he holds each toe. He wiggles the last toe, saying "wee wee wee" bitterly, as if he's going to snap it off. Thomas looks at his new acquaintance with a mixture of apprehension and arousal.

Mr. Jaffee goes into a torrent about how he hates his wife's hideous feet. The camera, which has been getting progressively closer to the two men, is now right on top of them. Mr. Jaffee's eyes look like they're going to pop out of his skull. "She twists them into too-tight shoes, making them all corns and bunions," he snaps. "All because she won't wear the proper size!" He can't stand her toes touching him. "I have to get out of the bed until she's asleep." He describes a dream in which his wife's feet become disembodied, "stepping all over my face, trampling me, shoving them in my mouth."

Thomas says he believes dreams mean a lot. Mr. Jaffee describes another dream in which his wife locked him in a closet and threw solid balls of blood at

him, which explode and cover him. He then mentions that his wife leaves her "sanitary pads" on the sink for him to throw out.

"That's probably why you had the dream," consoles Thomas, then relates his own female blood-and-shit tale. He worked in a restaurant and had to clean the john. Women would stuff their pads down the toilet and it would overflow. "It was disgusting. And I'd have to take this long pole-like thing . . . and I just couldn't take it. I had to quit."

At this point it's obvious that Mr. Jaffee has found a sob sister and fellow outcast. Who else would put up with his bitching except Thomas, this odd duck who's too skinny, too sensitive for camping, and doesn't fit in with the homosexual netherworld. They're two masochists in a gay bathhouse talking about bodily fluids, toilets, and how much they hate menstruating women. No wonder Mr. Jaffee's wife can barely stand him.

Mr. Jaffee then touches Thomas's skin: "It's soft, like my son Billy's." He kisses Thomas gently on the forehead before letting loose with the final and most shocking segment of his monologue. Mr. Jaffee starts talking about his son, and it's obvious he wants Thomas to play son to his daddy. "Billy looked nothing like either one of us. I wondered if Isabella had a secret admirer." He mentions that Billy had died exactly a year ago that day. "Oh, forgive me," Thomas says sympathetically.

The boy had been a jock on the high school football team, and Jaffee talks in a worshipful way about his son's great physical beauty before explaining that he was swimming and got dragged down by an undertow and drowned as two friends shouted for help. "The next day they drained the lake. There were snakes, thousands of snakes. Wrapped around Billy. They took bites out of his flesh."

He talks about the funeral: "The mourners brought flowers, all sorts of flowers. I just looked at them like flowers of death. I had them all burned. There was one flower Billy loved—a sunflower. All that pasty makeup they used, the cotton in his cheeks, made him look all distorted. He always had good structure, like you . . ." By this time the audience knows that Thomas has a freak on his hands, but where will the sick scene end?

Suddenly, the queens burst in laughing and ridicule Mr. Jaffee's cologne. "Oh! God! What *smells? LIME!* How *CHEAP.*" Mr. Jaffee looks less angry than annoyed at the interruption, but Thomas screams hysterically at the queens to "Get the fuck out! You're right, Mr. Jaffee. This *is* an insane asylum."

Jaffee goes to check out, telling Thomas not to leave; he's going to bring him something. At this point he looks completely sinister. Part of the tension throughout the film comes from speculating if Mr. Jaffee's stories are real at all. By now you don't know if he's having a complete nervous breakdown, if his story is a prelude to a sexual outburst, or both.

Thomas reclines on his bed and smokes a cigarette nervously, waiting. The queens, who have functioned as *Vapors'* Greek chorus, storm in again, bearing a gift-shop box. "I *told* you to leave," Thomas chides. "Your *friend* Mr. Jaffee had us bring up this package for you," the queens scoff back. "Open the gay surprise!" Thomas opens the box, revealing a huge papier mâché sunflower. "If I got a flower that big I'd sit on it," one queen snickers. Thomas shoos them out and bursts into tears, clutching the box. "And this little piggy cried wee wee wee all the way home . . ." Thomas softly and sadly moans to himself.

A muscular, dark-haired guy (Ron Keith) opens the door to Thomas's room. "Were you saying something?" "No I wasn't . . . oh, I said come in." Ron opens his robe, revealing his enormous dick, then a black strip suddenly obscures his cock, which comes directly at the camera.

The movie ends with a curious illustrated title card of its West Coast distributor, "Pacific Flicks."

*Vapors* is proof that Andy's real interests and skills were in portraying the dynamics of tenderloin sexuality in all its forms, making it an art form. It's one of his best and most personal films, his authentic Popeye manifesto *cum* poetic ode to the sexually suffocating closet case who's unable or unwilling to break free. The only way this type can express himself is by acting out. The instant theater created by his coming emotionally unglued always finds a receptive audience with queens who are so overwhelming that no closet ever could contain them.

The film offers a perfect simulacrum of the kind of deranged emotional outpouring one would overhear in bathhouses and grungy 8th Avenue adult theaters. Many a freak came to the Deuce just to *talk*—sometimes a verbal spillage was their version of quickie sex. They'd spew long, stream-of-consciousness psychobabble about real or imagined heterosexual family lives far away from 42nd Street. Such customers were disliked or ridiculed by theater workers. Were the shocking episodes they recounted intended to turn on the teller or the listener? They obviously got off on making themselves such public spectacles and centers

of attention; no one would pay attention to them otherwise. Like Mr. Jaffee, perhaps they were merely upset and in desperate need of human company, but that made them no more bearable to be around.

*Vapors* turns the viewer into the unwitting spectator at such an episode. It's a candid snapshot of Times Square's cavalcade of homosexual tics: fetishism, dirty talk, repellent sex, anonymous homosexual sex, gay guys hunting for straight guys who'll fall off the wagon, loneliness, and the most pathetic, desperate need for sexual contact—ships passing in the night, relieving themselves on whoever's available. In *Vapors,* Andy's gay universe consists of bitchy, effeminate faggots and masculine guys with miserable straight lives. Andy himself liked to apply serious force to men and had a taste for female dominance; *Vapors* reflects both sides of his personality within its all-male structure.

Daring in the sense that it was shot in pre-Stonewall Manhattan, the lavender lifestyle the film depicts was technically illegal at the time it was made. Gay slang like "Miss Thing," "drag ball," "mary," or "trick" weren't yet familiar even in independent or underground films. *Vapors* also pre-dated the genre of early 1970s bathhouse plays like Jerry Douglas's *Tubstrip,* which featured X-film actors Jamie Gillis and Jim Cassidy on stage in towels.





The film also displays some of Andy's best and most controlled camerawork. Apart from the brief, shaky exterior shots, Andy's camera is steady and builds in understatement, which is quite different from his later work. He works like a theater director, following actors closely, trying to capture each transient reaction. Since the Bolex had no zoom, Andy was required to get physically close to the two protagonists for close-ups, which gives the audience the feeling of being stuck in the bathhouse cubicle with them. The film has none of the visual chaos of Andy's horror films, revealing that the more sexually driven the subject, the calmer Andy became cinematically. He's in firm control throughout, even in the waist-up or overhead POV shots of the gossiping, chain-smoking queens. The soundtrack is also clearer than in many of Andy's other films, consisting mostly of two-person exchanges within a small space.

The male nudity gives the film its exploitation shock value. There's the brief scene of Gerry Jacuzzo undressing at the outset. The "this little piggy" sequence is typical of 60s softcore fetishism, when only certain body parts could be shown. The film's canny camera placement has implications of offscreen hand move-

ments that make you *think* you're seeing more than you are. The climactic black strip across the male member works both as an underground film technique and as a reminder of a time when male frontal nudity was legally considered obscene. There's a subliminal view of Ron Keith's cock as the black bar fails to fully obscure it, and it overwhelms the lens, providing a metaphor for male sexual noncontainment.

*Vapors* amply displays Andy's abilities as an actors' director, with the entire cast giving standout performances. Gerry Jacuzzo is believably quirky as Thomas, Hal Borske is a vicious, mouthy, sexually luckless faggot, and Ron Keith, who had the most personally kinky reputation among the Andy Milligan stock players, supplies an appropriate climax. Robert Dahdah as Mr. Jaffee is the real surprise here, though, giving a performance that's nothing short of brilliant, running the full emotional gamut: alternately gentle and overbearing, bullying and pathetic, closety daddy and angst-ridden, sex-neutered talk freak.

Andy knew Dahdah from the latter's floating repertory company, which would tour hospitals and benefits, performing one-act plays. "I cast Andy as a curmudgeon," recalled Dahdah, and he was perfect. Andy had two baby teeth in front and he looked just like a leprechaun. He didn't have the beard then, but always a weatherbeaten face. He was wonderful, very funny. And then I started doing plays at the Caffé Chino and Andy was doing plays at the Caffé Chino."

A dedicated Method actor, Dahdah felt that Mr. Jaffee "was telling the truth. He was desperately lonely and wanted human contact. His son died in this tragic accident. He had an unhappy marriage. He was desperate for human contact, any contact. And knew he'd find it at the baths. He didn't go there necessarily looking for sex, but knew that there was the possibility of an altercation. At that point, he was what I'd call trisexual. 'I'll try anything once.' "

"Andy knew what he was doing as a director," Robert remembers. With his tiny Bolex, Andy "was right on top of you. It was a rehearsal and a take. Always one take. 'One take and get it right,' as he put it. If you made a mistake, it stayed in and it showed up. At one point in *Vapors*, I mistook a line, but it went with the character. There wasn't a long rehearsal schedule. I'm pretty sure he did all my scenes in one day. One afternoon. He shot the other scenes—the entrance to the baths, the baths, the cast running around in towels—other times. Andy only gave me the part of the script that had my lines. I didn't know about the guys running around

in towels. I never knew there was a scene at the entrance, or the scene where I left the guy crying."

Such techniques are lauded by auteurs like Woody Allen, who utilize them to maximize the believability of an actor's performance. But Andy did it for cost: "I gave the actors only the pages from the script where their lines were. The budgets were so small that we couldn't afford Xeroxing the script for each actor. In the early days of Xerox, it was 8, 9, 12 cents a page instead of 3 or 4 cents. We'd make four copies of the scripts. One went to the script girl and one was split up for all the actors."

*Vapors* made Andy aware of the commercial and creative potential of filmmaking. He next made a film with the working title *Liz,* about a model's descent into prostitution. Distributor William Mishkin offered to buy the film if Andy heated it up with a few nude scenes. Mishkin retitled the film *The Promiscuous Sex* and it was a sexploitation smash, running six months in 1967 at the World Theater, a popular 49th Street adult house that would become infamous in 1972 as the birthplace of porno chic when it premiered *Deep Throat.*







William Mishkin was one of the oldest Times Square–based exploitation distributors. He'd been a Deuce distributor since the 1950s, giving European imports risqué titles and campaigns, then moved into the nudie era with Russ Meyer's *Steam Heat* (aka *The Immoral Mr. Tens,* 1959) and J. Nehemiah's *The Orgy at Lil's Place* (1964). Mishkin used shoestring huckersterism in marketing movies made on ultra-low budgets, pioneering outrageous campaigns that catered to audiences' basest instincts with overwhelming images and iconographic titles. But only the most desperate, bottom-drawer filmmakers dealt with Mishkin. Mike Findlay and John Amero ran from him after he made an offer for *Body of a Female* that was so low that it would barely have paid for the cost of the film. Mishkin's son Lew joined the family business after graduating law school, and during his life showed open hostility and total disgust for the exploitation genre that his father funded, helped create, and profited from.

With an office right in Times Square, the Mishkin family became Andy's primary producer/distributor, financing and merchandising his biggest hits. This begat a lifelong love-hate relationship. The Mishkins always got the better of the bargain, but they did pay Andy something—*enough.* Enough for him to buy real estate on Staten Island.

In 1967 and 1968, Andy made Mishkin a slew of sexploitation moneymakers that included the smash hits *The Filthy Five, Gutter Trash,* and *Kiss Me, Kiss Me, Kiss Me,* cranking them out so rapidly that Mishkin sat on some for over a year before booking them in the Lyric Theater, where they played for years in double- and triple-bill permutations.

The Lyric audiences got a blast out of Andy's sexploitation movies, with their relatively raw straight sex, blunt depictions of homosexual milieus familiar to Times Square regulars, combative dialogue peppered with four-letter words, and twisted, symbiotic relationships, with their inherent sadism. The films' technical crudeness became an extension of their underlying aggression.

*The Filthy Five* (1968) features a young Frederic Forrest (billed as "Matt Garth") playing Johnny Longo, a boxer kept by a hooker. Johnny gets an improbable break in showbiz when he lands a TV part opposite an aging, dope-addicted former Hollywood star named Rita Roman. Johnny and Rita become involved, while Johnny's hooker girlfriend fumes in jealousy. The movie builds to a metasexual rape scene, with the actress, her gay dope connection, and two other guys exploding on a teenage girl. This hostile orgy leads to a brawl on a staircase that injures Johnny. In a typically pessimistic Andy Milligan ending, Johnny is left unable to box and completely dependent on his now bitter prostitute girlfriend. Andy was quite proud that Archer Winsten of the *New York Post* reviewed *The Filthy Five.* "He said it was cheaply made and stuff but was the best 'cinema verité' he'd seen. Winsten saw three of my movies and was always very kind to them. *The New York Times* didn't review that kind of stuff."

*Kiss Me, Kiss Me, Kiss Me* concerned an honest, thickheaded construction worker whose slatternly, boozing wife cheats on him. The movie climaxes with both of them falling off a rooftop as they literally argue to death. Robert Dahdah played a bartender. "We shot it right at the bar at the Caffé Chino. There was a nude shower scene and that was something daring at the time. That movie played for months and months at the Rialto, on Broadway between 42nd and 43rd." Despite its low budget, *Kiss Me, Kiss Me, Kiss Me* garnered relatively favorable notices from the movie industry trade publications *Boxoffice* and *Variety.* At the same time, *Vapors* became a mainstay at the Cameo Theater on 44th Street and 8th Avenue.

Andy's next Mishkin release, *Tricks of the Trade,* is about a repressed, closety

guy who lives under his mother-in-law's thumb. He wanders around Greenwich Village and gets picked up by a bisexual beatnik couple who feed him hallucinogens, have sex with him when he's stoned, and take snapshots of everything. A sinister queen wearing a neck brace uses the photos to blackmail the hapless mook. He fights back, first by telling off his mother-in-law and then by lashing out physically at the queen and his entourage of goons, who wind up knocking him senseless, leaving him an amnesiac Bowery bum.

Andy said his sexploitation movies had nudity, "but this was long before hardcore—you couldn't show that then. Someone goes down on somebody in a john—I'd always stick things like that in. You saw it but you didn't. You ***knew*** it was happening. Other softcores didn't have any male homosexuality and Mishkin didn't like it. But I'd always find a way to stick some crazy queen in there one way or another. The off-Broadway theater, where the actors came from, was filled with a bunch of crazy queens. All of our stuff was automatically X-rated because of the language. We used words like cunt, fuck, cocksucker first."



Andy's wife, Candy Hammond, stars in *Gutter Trash* as "Pussy Johnson," whose unfortunate story emerges in flashback as she's interviewed by a jailhouse psychiatrist. Pussy is the archetypal girl who comes to Manhattan looking for a modeling job and some kicks and winds up violated, turned out, and, finally, in prison.



Andy's *Seeds* (1967) was distributed by a small outfit named Harrington Films, and was one of the few sex movies Andy made outside of the Mishkin orbit. Andy was adept at obtaining financing from restaurateurs in his neighborhood, and he had to look no further than Restaurant Row, four blocks north of the Deuce, on 46th Street between 8th and 9th Avenue, for the capital to make *Seeds.* Allen and Rosily Bazzini, who owned an after-theater dinner spot, funded the movie.



*Seeds* is Andy's cynical melodrama about a dysfunctional family. It shows how he can tell a good, lurid Popeye story of sex and money, familial greed and hatred, trapping you for ninety minutes with people you loathe. In *Seeds,* an old hag who looks like Andy in drag—but who is most likely just a proxy for his hated mother—plays a bitter, wheelchair-bound matriarch. Andy's wife, Candy Hammond, plays her feisty daughter who entertains herself by looking at muscle magazines. As a good-natured exhibitionist, Candy shows the bubbliest, take-no-shit

attitude of anyone in the cast. Her brother (played by Neil Flanagan) is a masochistic clergyman. Ultimately, the hate mounts and everyone gets murdered in grotesque ways. With its simulated blow jobs and fairly explicit sex, *Seeds* is just a shade away from hardcore; as with *Vapors*, the film shows that when Andy focused on neurotic sex, he was at his best as a filmmaker. One of the cornerstones of Andy's filmmaking are the characters' hysterical, angry outbursts, and *Seeds* ends with a doozy: After Candy pushes her old bag mother down a flight of stairs in her wheelchair, she sings and dances, "Step on a crack, break your mother's back!" over and over. What a tough bitch.

Although Andy was married to Candy, he claimed to be "bisexual, but anything turns me on." He liked casual anonymous pick-ups at all-male theaters like 14th Street's notorious Metropolitan, where, he once chortled to Mr. Sleazoid, "they suck your cock right behind the screen, babe!" He loved the impromptu surrealism of that. Andy's private dalliances were extreme: He was part of a circle of career chickenhawks that traded professional underage masochist boys known as "princes" for abuse sessions. Andy made his sex objects the target of personal as well as carnal hostility. Hal Borske recalled with disgust that "one of the princes—Andy suddenly smashed the kid's glasses after the session was over."

Robert Dahdah also commented on Andy's sadistic bisexual proclivities. "I went to see a play Andy directed called *The Maids* [by Jean Genet] at the Caffé Chino. When it was over I sat with him at a table and the actress that had the lead, one of the leads, came and sat with us. Then the other actress came out too, but she was furious. She walked by fast and she wouldn't sit. I asked Andy why she was so angry. And Andy said, 'She's angry because she really got whipped tonight. When the woman was whipping her, she really whipped her.' And I said, 'You mean to tell me that you didn't block it so that she wouldn't be whipped? And he said, 'It was her job to dodge it.' *Up to her to dodge it . . .*" mumbled Dahdah disquietedly.

"In a play, *The Executioner;* that Andy put on at the Caffé Chino, the woman, her husband is dying or something and he's all chewed up in the back and she puts salt on his wounds. That man would let out a scream that was heard around the world. I don't know what she was doing to him but he let out some scream and the neighborhood would complain to the police about the scream twice a night. He let out a scream that you could hear in Brooklyn. And there was this little boy who got punched, kicked around, *absolutely pummeled.* At the end of the play,

he'd get up to take a bow and could barely move. . . . I never knew what happened to that boy."

After making the sexploitation films, Andy and Candy moved from Manhattan to a remote part of suburbanized and relatively bucolic Staten Island, "where they shot the Irish Spring commercials," as Andy loved to say. His new residence gave him the idea of going in the direction of filming period-piece horror movies.

Andy had already experimented with the horror format when he made *The Naked Witch,* a film he shot in Manasquan, New Jersey in 1964. He was especially proud of the striking imagery he created when a group of women, all clad in black, rush the heroine on a beach to kill her. Mishkin had released the movie in 1967 with a sexploitational title and ad campaign in order to capitalize on some brief nudity, but *The Naked Witch* gave Andy the idea that he could subversively vent his sexual concerns using the horror genre. He was right.

*The Ghastly Ones,* made in 1968, is among Andy's most interesting and popular horror films, although it's still a bumpy viewing experience. Three greedy sisters and their husbands have to fill their dead father's mansion with "convivial bliss" in order to collect on his will. Between sexual encounters that resemble boxing matches, characters get hanged, pitchforked, disemboweled, dismembered, and decapitated. The latter provides the film's memorable image of a woman's head in a salad bowl.

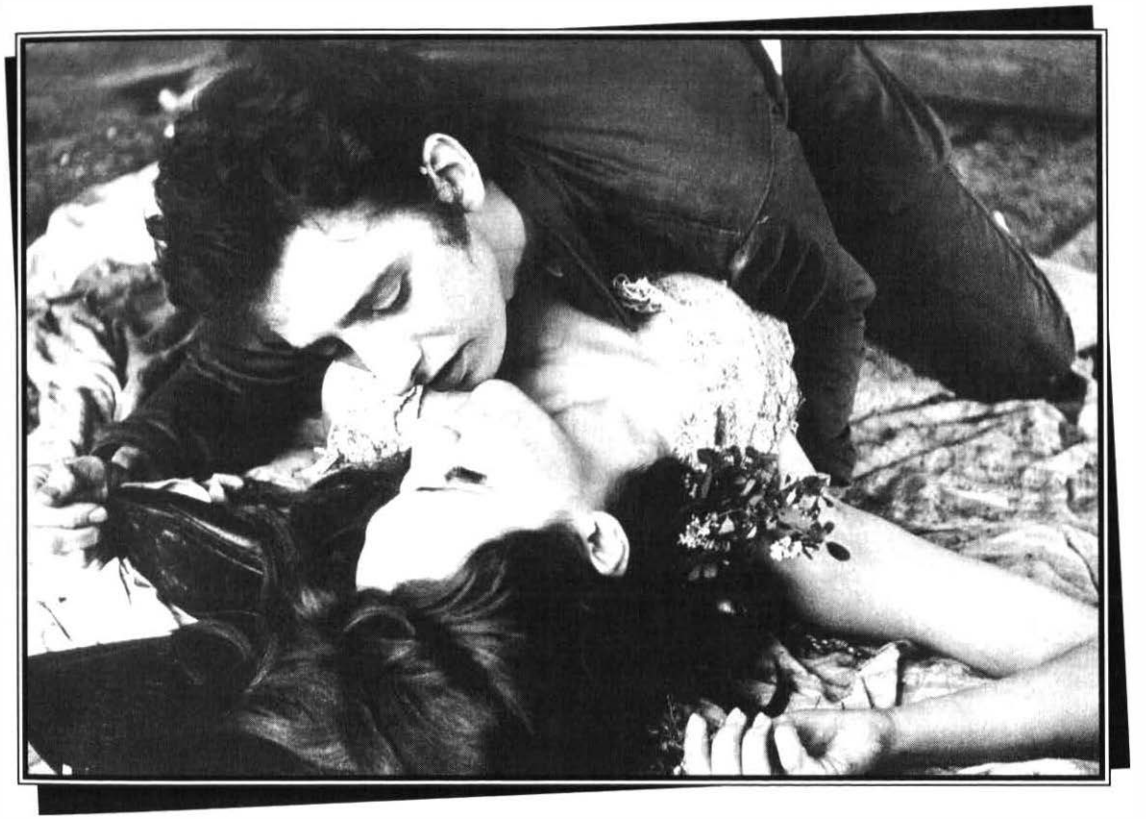
In *The Ghastly Ones,* Andy's universe is all bright red and green costumes seen through the wild POV of a hand-held Bolex. The murder scenes have heavy sadomasochistic undertones, with the victims intricately bound and gagged. *The Ghastly Ones* is also one of the first exploitation movies to present full frontal male nudity.

Andy struck a deal with Jerry Balsam, a theatrical attorney who helmed JER Pictures and operated out of Times Square, to distribute the film. Balsam gave it an eyecatching campaign, and then continued to revive it for years after its initial release, most notably on a double bill with the horror oddity *The Headless Eyes* in 1971 (see chapter 6).

Balsam also released two of Andy's sexploitation movies, the postapocalyptic sexual psychodrama *The Degenerates* and an LSD-fueled wife-swapping saga called *The Depraved* (both 1967). Andy wound up hating Balsam, feeling that he'd screwed him out of money by using legalistic finagling, and making it worse by

laughing at him after the fact. Andy never dealt with Balsam again, and was afterward easily prone to hateful rants about him. "Distributors are crooks. All of 'em," was an Andy Milligan maxim.

Andy was forced to return to the Mishkins for distribution of his 1970 Staten Island period piece, *Torture Dungeon.* They were the only ones who'd have him. *Torture Dungeon* is even slower than *The Ghastly Ones,* but has its inspired moments. Hal Borske plays an heir to a throne who's so retarded he can barely get the sex act right on his wedding night. In an Andy Milligan movie, sex is an act, a duty, a responsibility, a chore to be dealt with—always in exchange for money or some other reward. Gerry Jacuzzo, who starred as Thomas in *Vapors,* appears this time as a villain with a Prince Valiant hairdo who's given to declarations like, "I'm



Heterosexual rape, Milligan style. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)

trisexual. I'll try anything once." That line always cracked up the Lyric audience, and Robert Dahdah chuckles, "Andy got that one from me!" Mishkin packaged *Torture Dungeon* with such a provocative (if misleading) S&M-slanted campaign that it kept popping up on 42nd Street for a decade after its initial release.

Shortly after, Andy made *Guru, the Mad Monk,* another perpetual Deuce replay. It stars Milligan stock player Neil Flanagan as a schizophrenic monk with a torture chamber and a lesbian vampire mistress. The movie takes place mostly in one room, with a sprinkle of Staten Island exteriors. Although *Guru* was set in the Middle Ages, Andy's Bolex accidentally allowed contemporary objects like electrical outlets into the frame, which always caused laughs to waft through the Lyric, and Neil's long soliloquies to nothing in particular would provoke some audience members to yell, "Shut up and get on with it!"

By 1970, Andy was spending less and less time with Candy and she no longer appeared in his films. Andy became more determined to use the period pieces as his mode of self-expression. He made a pilgrimage to England to shoot *The Body Beneath, Bloodthirsty Butchers,* and *The Man with Two Heads.* England had strict rules against non-union productions, so Andy filmed everything on the sly.

The vampire film *The Body Beneath* (1970) displays a little more conventional moviemaking skill than your average Milligan opus, but without sacrificing his distinct low-fi style. The camerawork is fluid and expressionistic, with death scenes appearing in lieu of sexual climaxes. While making *The Body Beneath,* Andy enjoyed sneaking into London's Highgate Cemetery for location shots.

Andy's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde foray, *The Man with Two Heads,* is another claustrophobic opus filmed in one room. Dr. Jekyll is a bushy-haired misogynist who constantly yells at his female students. One Lyric audience member yelled back, "Go fuck yourself!" After drinking his own experimental potion, he abuses and murders hookers, in one instance treating a woman like a dog. Though the film is mostly asleep, Andy tosses in a psychedelic S&M orgy scene out of nowhere, which elicited cries of "What the hell?!" and gales of laughter from the audience.

*Bloodthirsty Butchers* is Andy's version of Sweeney Todd. It opens as Sweeney places a scalding hot towel on one of his customer's faces, then slits his throat and amputates a finger to retrieve a ring. Endless arguments between Sweeney and virtually everyone he encounters are punctuated by eccentric gore

Andy Milligan's most professional film, shot partly on the sly at Highgate Cemetery in England. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection, courtesy Something Weird Video)

scenes, from breasts found in meat pies to butcher cleavers thrown at a character's head.

One of the most misanthropic films ever made, *Bloodthirsty Butchers* depicts relations between men and women in nothing but hateful ways. When someone asks Sweeney for marriage advice, he grunts, "You screw 'em." All the characters seem to be played by the same unpleasant looking actor with a huge hook nose. Andy had a casting knack that extended beyond his stock company. John Miranda, who plays Sweeney, later became familiar to mainstream audiences for such slackjawed characters as Fonzie's older greaser pal in *Happy Days* and innumerable Hollywood roles. Still, everything has an exaggeratedly ugly quality, from moles on faces to bread on tables, all amplified by the grainy 16mm blow-up photography. The barely audible dialogue is meshed within endlessly looped ye-olde-music-hall tunes culled off Andy's scratchy 78s.

*Bloodthirsty Butchers* is simultaneously hilariously cranky and unwatchably grating, yet it became one of Andy's most popular movies, a Lyric Theater favorite that eventually made its way to virtually every drive-in and grindhouse in America. In the exploitation movie schematic, the United States was divided into about fifteen territories, each controlled by different subdistributors. A subdistributor would front money to a primary distributor like Mishkin to show a film in its territory. If the movie proved popular, the subdistributor would purchase prints outright from the main distributor. The subdistributor would subsequently use the prints whenever necessary as a revival, second feature, or even as part of a dusk-to-dawn show. This distribution feeding chain was consistent with the exploitation theology of the one-time payment, with no residuals ever seen by cast members, directors, producers, or the primary distributor.

*Bloodthirsty Butchers* exemplifies why so many exploitation movies have multiple versions, with some viewers remembering scenes that others never saw. The film was originally rated X for sex, violence, language, and general tone. Knowing that certain theaters wouldn't run an X-rated film, Mishkin agreed to the necessary cuts for an MPAA R rating, which naturally consisted of the most shocking and most commercial exploitation scenes. He then slapped the R rating on the poster and ad campaign, but would send the uncut film anyway, knowing that the Hollywood-driven MPAA wouldn't often check up on such a low-rent film. If

the film did get caught at specific theaters, the projectionist would hack the scenes out of those particular prints. Uncut prints spread through the subdistributors, although some would soften them up for certain prudish territories. Some projectionists clipped and stole scenes for their own film collections, and others chopped out segments when making a quick splice on a worn print that had broken. Thus, the world was left with many versions of the same film.

*Bloodthirsty Butchers* was one of Andy's most widely seen movies. Andy knew his movies were popular on the Deuce and had a sense of satisfaction from entertaining his audience, but he also knew his movies made much more for the people who distributed them, which only fed his bitterness and misanthropy. Eventually, Andy tired of making so little profit from his films and attempted to be his own distributor, releasing *The Body Beneath* and *Guru, the Mad Monk* through a company he formed called Nova Films. But he wound up making even less on these than he did with Mishkin, who at least knew how to deal with exhibitors and subdistributors—when Andy did business with New York theater owners he knew, like Chelly Wilson, they walked all over him. They wouldn't pay him. They wouldn't return prints. Driven to hysteria, Andy would wind up barging into their offices and theaters, looking like an evil Lepruchaun and screaming, "Give me my fuckin' movies back!" After this grim experience, he was driven back to working for the Mishkins.

When the rat horror movie *Willard* was a smash hit in 1971, Mishkin cashed in by retitling Andy's otherwise unreleasable shot-in-England werewolf flick, *The Rats Are Coming! the Werewolves Are Here!* Mishkin needed some rodent-themed footage to suit the new title, and Andy added a few new scenes shot in Staten Island, including a prankish cameo where he plays a rat salesman. In one of the notoriously cheap Mishkin's tie-in gimmicks, joke-store rats were given out at theaters with each ticket.

Around this time, Andy split for good with Candy, although he was fond of noting they were never legally divorced. Candy left Staten Island for the sunny shores of Puerto Rico; she could no longer tolerate Andy's dalliances with men. Andy landed in the purgatory of 39th Street between 8th and 9th Avenues. One of Manhattan's worst blocks, it's two blocks south of the Port Authority Bus Terminal and next to the Koppel Clinic, one of the city's first and foulest methadone clinics,

Poster for Milligan's *The Rats Are Coming! the Werewolves Are Here!* distributor William Mishkin's cash-in on *Willard*. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)

serving a clientele of Times Square scum and junkies. Roving winos, coke fiends, and sweatshop workers rounded out the street's population. Appropriately, Andy kept a loaded shotgun by his bolted front door.

Without Candy around, Andy's themes turned more overtly homosexual. He put on a play called *Section 8* at Chelly Wilson's Jewel Theater, a lower Third Avenue cruise spot dedicated to gay porn. The play dealt with an incident that had haunted Andy since his Navy days, when one of his friends had been dishonorably discharged for homosexuality and as a result committed suicide. *Section 8* would open to the oldie song "Tangerine" as one of Andy's kinky pals masturbated to climax.

Andy then made one of his most obscure movies, *Dragula* (1971), which few people saw during its brief midnight run. Calvin Holt, the owner of the popular Upper East Side restaurant Serendipity, produced the film, which was shot on Fire Island. It's a homosexual retelling of the vampire myth, pitting Dracula's two sons—a good but dimwitted fool (Hal Borske) and his evil, handsome sibling (Calvin Culver)—against each other. At this time, Culver was an aspiring actor who waited tables at Serendipity and hustled on the side. He's familiar to grindhouse audiences as the thrill-seeking rich kid whose balls get cut off by Cheri Caffaro in *Ginger,* but he would become gay porn's first icon under the pseudonym Casey Donovan in the trailblazing hardcore hits *Boys in the Sand* and *The Back Row.*

In 1973, Mishkin released one of Andy's best films, *Fleshpot on 42nd Street,* a mixture of soap opera, filmed play, and cinema verité. A frank, intimate depiction of the Deuce's sex-for-sale milieu and his analysis of the behavior patterns that emerge within it, it remains one of Andy's most interesting, personal, and authentically Times Square films.

*Fleshpot* was Andy's last sexploitation feature, and dealt with a specialized, troublemaking gendertwist situation that exists in high-frequency red light districts: the drag queen who hooks up with a miserable, plain female prostitute as a coconspirator. Dysfunctional, predatory people by nature, they think they've got all bases covered; instead, they only attract tricks with the most repressed, twisted needs, which makes them both natural magnets for violence. Only William Mishkin would finance a film like this, for he instinctively knew its built-in tenderloin audience. The subject matter had Shakespearean potential, but

Andy goes for cheap Tennessee Williams angst, which betrays his off-off-off-Broadway background.

The movie is a showcase of Andy's maddeningly intertwined strengths and inadequacies as a filmmaker, with his haphazard compositions revealing his outward contempt for the world at large and his audience in particular. The opening scenes of 42nd Street between Broadway and 8th Avenue are shot from a too-quickly-moving car, capturing none of the looming grindhouse marquees that were the Deuce's most distinct feature. What you do get is half-second-long glimpses of assorted nothings like Childs' Coffee Shop, Nedick's, and the Athena Liquor Store—and it's frustrating! The real settings were available, but the movie too often feels like a filmed play. When Andy cuts inside a bar or apartment, it's extremely dark and looks like the Troupe Theater's garage. However, the aspects of the film that do work amidst the chaos are miraculous, capturing hidden societal reality in progress.



We first encounter the protagonist, Dusty (Diana Lewis) sponging off yet another trick. The guy badgers her to get a job and clean his apartment: "Everyone has to work. We can't all like what we do." Dusty quixotically replies that she can't do anything that she doesn't enjoy. She's like every Andy Milligan sexploitation heroine, from Liz in *The Promiscuous Sex* to Pussy Johnson in *Gutter Trash:* a woman who comes to New York City, can't take the 9-to-5 grind, and drifts into prostitution and vice.

After Dusty pacifies the trick with some sex, she rips him off, fences his TV and radio, then tricks with her fence—and has the balls to steal from him, too.

Dusty rushes to 42nd Street to meet up with her drag cohort Cherry Lane (Neil Flanagan). A Milligan regular, Neil had a SAG card and did a lot of theater work, and also turned up in non-balling roles in big-budget 70s hardcore films, playing Daddy Warbucks in the triple-X *Little Orphan Sammy* and headshrinker to Harry Reems in the SAG-approved porno-chic hit *Sometimes Sweet Susan.* Andy's decision to cast Neil instead of a Warhol drag queen, who'd really want to be taken as a woman, paid off in spades. Neil is terrific. He's as frightening as the genuine article: a psychotic man in a wig and a dress.

In the tenderloin feeding chain, Cherry leeches off Dusty. They throw each other tricks that they can't or don't want to accommodate themselves. Cherry passes Jimmy the sadist to Dusty. Jimmy's an Irish Catholic whose wife won't

make it with him. He likes to give girls belt beatings. The soundtrack, which is mostly found bits of saxy instrumentals, suddenly turns into a contorted version of the *Mission Impossible* theme. Jimmy ups the ante with money, paying Dusty for a gang-bang situation. The first believable slob pulling the train is Fred Lincoln, who's best known as a porn actor and director. Complete with a Lucky Strikes cough, Fred is every bit the skeevy Hell's Kitchen junkie who'd shoot up on his toilet, the needle hanging out of his arm, as his wife and kids are banging on the bathroom door.

Dusty volleys this favor back when she throws a brutal trucker to Cherry. In a scene reminiscent of *Last Exit to Brooklyn* or *Heavy Traffic,* the trucker knocks the shit out of Cherry when he discovers his obvious member. "I guess he didn't like my wig," Cherry snipes.

When Cherry, Dusty, and more of their tenderloin cohorts gather together, there's a lot of Andy's trademark overlapping dialogue, though much of it is incomprehensible since there are no layers to the sound—it was recorded with one tiny mike. Still, audible bits of conversation ring true.

Improbably at a 42nd Street bar, Dusty meets a nice guy from Staten Island, Bob. He's got a 9-to-5 job and, incredibly, doesn't hold her job as a prostitute against her. He's comfortable with her, and that's what really matters. Ironically, it's a clean-shaven Harry Reems, billed as "Bob Walters," who plays Bob, and it's downright startling to see the human being he was before Harry became the grotesque, mustachioed, drug-fueled porno poster boy of the 1970s. Here, he demonstrates that he could play a low-key, sensitive character as well as the kind of crazed Vietnam vet rapist he portrayed in *Forced Entry.*

The casting of Reems here is especially astute. By the time *Fleshpot on 42nd Street* was made, Reems was easily recognizable to grindhouse audiences from Mishkin marriage manuals like *All About Sex of All Nations.* However, his role as Bob indicates a surprisingly noble attempt by Mishkin at bringing sex out of the *Man and Wife* mode and into the narrative context.

The sex scenes between Bob and Dusty are among the most lyrical Andy ever shot, calmly composed and based in affection rather than his usual hostility. By the time Dusty's calling Harry "Daddy" after spending the night with him, it's like a heterosexual version of Andy with one of his princes.

Nevertheless, you suspect that you'll soon see the cracks in Bob's prince

charming veneer. What was he doing in a 42nd Street bar filled with off-duty sex workers, anyway? When will he shatter the romance by laying some sort of awful head-trip on Dusty? Andy supplies a quick resolution: Bob is struck and killed by a car as Dusty walks him to the ferry. Scenes like this demonstrate the unique visual disequilibrium Andy was so adept at creating. His hand-held camera always seems to be moving a little too quickly or hectically, so when events break into a fast-moving chaos, he's actually in sync, and everything suddenly looks clear. This is also evident in combative sex scenes, as when Jimmy goes berserk at the gang-bang. For all their improvisatory feel, Andy's movies were heavily, verbosely scripted, but his screenplays would use one line—"SWIRL CAMERA"—to indicate these manic optical outbursts. "SWIRL CAMERA" also is used in the script for *The Ghastly Ones* and other Milligan horror opuses, and is the mark of someone with no technical ability or money to create an effect.

The last shot is of a vacant, junked-out Dusty on 42nd Street, picking up another customer, completing the downward yet all too believable spiral inherent in Andy's pessimistic worldview. You're left with the impression that Dusty will eventually die of an overdose. Like Pussy Johnson in *Gutter Trash,* Dusty has met the one guy who accepted her and offered her a door out of vice, but the brief happiness she had with Bob has only made the misery of her situation more painfully obvious to her.

Diana Lewis is excellent as Dusty. She's touching, with deep, sad lines on her face. Her sex scenes add to the emotional core she gives the movie and succeed in making her situation more believable. She's a fully realized, troubled heterosexual female character, as opposed to the fag hags Andy usually employed.

As with all of Andy's movies, there are pieces of him scattered all over *Fleshpot on 42nd Street.* Neil Flanagan, as the dour drag, seems like a grotesque Punch and Judy mouthpiece for Andy. There's a creepy autobiographical element about the relationship between Andy and his ex-wife in the story of Dusty and Cherry. Cherry has throwaway, self-referential lines like, "Let's go see *Bloodthirsty Butchers* and *Torture Dungeon* at the Lyric." Harry Reems gives a weird defense of Staten Island, New York City's most provincial and yahoo-populated borough, which Andy enjoyed living and filming in.

*Fleshpot* displays Andy's hatred of what he was, where he lived, and the kind of people he spent his life associating with. More than any of his other movies, it's

like flypaper for his mental illnesses, as if it were capturing and killing bugs that came out of his skull. As fucked up and uneven as it is, the film remains an affecting portrait of a real-life soap opera situation, a half-brilliant, genuinely alienated relic of its time and its maker.

In 1974, Andy returned to the horror genre with *Blood,* his bizarre yet static depiction of the marriage between the werewolf's grandson and Dracula's granddaughter (played by Hope Stansbury), both of whom are genetically watered down versions of their ancestors. The movie has touches like a vampiric plant, a crippled manservant who walks around on his knees, and Hope burying an axe in a guy's head, and in the film's concluding fight scene the couple choke each other as they perish amidst flames—perhaps mirroring Andy's feelings about marriage after his breakup with Candy. Andy claimed *Blood*'s $20,000 budget was his biggest yet, but much of it seems to have paid his Staten Island mortgage. The increased cost has no noticeable impact on the finished film.

Andy distributed *Blood* through Bryanston, creation of the mobster father-son tag team, Lou and Tony Peraino. The Perainos formed Bryanston as an accounting dodge to hide the illegal millions they'd made from *Deep Throat.* When Bryanston turned unexpectedly profitable with box office smashes like *Andy Warhol's Frankenstein* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre,* however, the Perainos caught the scrutiny of the IRS and other government agencies. The Perainos were notoriously difficult about making payments to producers and directors, but Andy was persistent about going to the Bryanston office to collect his checks.

Years of dealing with people like the Perainos, the Mishkins, Jerry Balsam, and Chelly Wilson ultimately squelched Andy's interest in the film business. At this point his cinematic output had dwindled to a fraction of what it had been at its peak: Instead of a film every other month, he was making one every few years. Tellingly, Andy had become so disillusioned with the movie business that, in 1978, he even tossed off an inferior remake of his own film, *The Ghastly Ones,* called *Legacy of Blood.*

The times had also changed. No longer shocking, Andy's movies seemed antiquated. Sex films had become much more explicit and professionally made. As the age of *Friday the 13th* approached, the blood horror audience became quickly impatient with anything less than technically accomplished special effects, which

Andy called "a pain in the ass. They take all day to rig and last a few seconds on screen."

Andy had none of the self-amused quality of Herschell Gordon Lewis or the joie de vivre of Eurosex king Jesse Franco. He wanted his films to be taken seriously and was annoyed that aficionados of the genre found them unintentionally funny. He'd get aggressive and defensive when audiences chuckled at his technical mishaps, snapping back, "I'd like to see anyone else make a film on that money."

He hated many of the things fans enjoyed most about his films, like their outrageous campaigns and titles, and railed against William Mishkin for tacking what he called "stupid" titles like *Bloodthirsty Butchers* and *Torture Dungeon* onto his films. He claimed that his profits had paid for Lew Mishkin, whom he called "William's idiot son," to attend law school. With Andy and the Mishkin family, it was a case of dependence breeding hostility. Lew later recalled that "Andy and I did business together. He made a buck and I made a buck, but we never got along. Calling him a cranky, cantankerous man is about the most polite thing anyone could say about him."



In the world before home video and the Internet, it took legwork and obsession to track down obscure exploitation filmmakers. Coauthor Landis met Andy in 1981 at the prompting of Ron Roccia, an exploitation film collector who lived on LSD and S'mores in his mother's suburban Philly basement. Ron had a 16mm screening room in his basement, but he'd also make periodic runs to Times Square, making the rounds of grindhouses and stopping in offbeat sexual spots. Ron had an astonishing knowledge of the Milligan oeuvre and had collected prints of several of Andy's films. Ron had met Andy on one of his Times Square jaunts. "Andy's an old queen, Bill. He reminds me of Rip Taylor. He's at a little play theater just south of the Deuce. Go meet him!"

Andy did resemble Rip Taylor, but looked more like the archetype of the Times Square Popeye. He sported the classic Popeye wardrobe: beltless plaid flair pants cutting into his spare tire, a peacoat jacket, and a blue stocking cap. Andy had a ruddy complexion, a balding head of white hair that showed traces of the reddish blonde it had once been, and a short beard that partially obscured scars on one cheek.

Andy's 39th Street apartment was orderly and sunny, even if it resembled an

oversized serviceman's furnished room. Andy kept three prints of his films in his apartment: *The Body Beneath* and *Guru, the Mad Monk,* both of which he had physically removed from nearby grindhouses, along with the unreleased *Nightbirds* (1970).

The latter was one of Andy's most bizarre movies, one that he shot as a deviation from working on his horror films in London. Intended as a statement about cruelty and codependence, and similar to Robert Altman's *That Cold Day in the Park,* it's about a predatory older woman who takes in a young drifter whom she sexually degrades and murders. Andy had brought some American cast members with him, but *Nightbirds* starred his London discovery, Berwick Kaylor, a young man who resembled a malevolent Eric Clapton. Andy had a great affinity for *Nightbirds,* and enjoyed discussing it as he gently tapped on the film can.

Throughout the early 1980s, Andy devoted most of his attention to the off-off-Broadway theater beneath his apartment, the Troupe. The venue's exterior had ominous Christmas lights that made it look less like a theater and more like the dingy Haymarket bar on 8th Avenue and 47th Street, a lowdown trick spot for cheap rough trade hustlers. Inside, it was rather small and garage-like, with the first floor used for plays. Red was the predominant color, with yellow lights playing down on audience and cast members. During the performances, Andy was all over the place, changing a minimal set, doing a character part, and providing aural commentary on the play from a DJ booth, where he'd spin excerpts from the same old 78s he used for his films. You'd be watching a Troupe Theater production and suddenly recognize the unforgettable bleating horn from *Bloodthirsty Butchers* wafting out of the speakers.

One Troupe Theater production dealt with bums battling the bottle, and featured a stocking-capped Andy in a supporting role. Another of Andy's plays, *Reflections,* dealt with a black couple's romance. Andy had always said that love stories were the easiest plays to stage or movies to film, requiring only two characters and no technical wizardry. There were Andy's signature arguments, including one triggered by the guy's confession to his girlfriend about his dalliances with hookers. One night, after the show was over, life did a sleazy imitation of art as the lead headed out to the corner of 9th Avenue and picked up a streetwalker.

As low-fi and close to his exploitation roots as Andy steadfastly remained, he could clearly envision the future of film. He predicted that by the year 2000 movies

would be made on video, and be indistinguishable from film. He also knew multiplexes would be the new theatrical venues. Despite his flashes of prescience, though, Andy was often quite out of touch with reality. For instance, he was involved in shooting what were intended to be pilots for a TV series called *Red Rooster* in 16mm. No one shot TV shows in 16mm anymore. *Red Rooster* was about a dress shop owner, with gags like Jimmy Carter, long after he was out of office, getting outfitted in drag. Andy thought that skit in particular would be a real prime-time rib tickler.

Andy's realization that he still had a dedicated audience revitalized his interest in filmmaking. By the summer of 1983, he was back at work on a horror movie called *Carnage.* He photographed for the first time in 35mm, using cut-rate ends of film stock, shooting in Manhattan and Staten Island. Coauthor Landis worked on Andy's crew, taking time off from his job managing the shoebox adult grindhouse, the Doll, on 47th Street and 7th Avenue. The film was an entertaining haunted house escapade that wound up being released directly to home video. On the set, Andy was much like he was with his tiny Bolex in *Vapors*—a peppery munchkin zooming all over the place, supervising the crew, searching for the best camera angles, acting out scenes for the performers.

By 1986, 39th Street was infested with crackheads, and Andy was sick of New York. He took off to L.A., leaving behind a bunch of hapless bill collectors and the Troupe Theater building, a forlorn "for sale" sign tacked on its front fire escape. The IRS wasn't among his creditors, though. Andy proudly boasted of never paying a dime of taxes in his life.

Andy liked L.A. He dug the climate and Bob's Big Boy restaurant. The gay housing complex he lived in seemed positively serene compared to 39th Street. He started making films like *The Weirdo* (1989) and *Monstrosity* (1991), which ends with a Felliniesque scene of Andy behind the camera. This finale, which reinforced the unreality of everything the viewer had just witnessed, was a fitting coda to his career.

In 1999, Lew Mishkin recalled, "The easiest dealing I had with Andy Milligan was during *Weirdo.* The producers had no way of reaching him. I gave them his number in California. I got a finder's fee of a few hundred bucks and didn't have to see Andy's face or even talk to him."

Tragically, Andy contracted AIDS, and after a long and difficult passage he never wanted to make, died on June 3, 1991, at the age of 62.

Of Andy's long-time cast members, Neil Flanagan was one of the first to succumb to AIDS. His wife, Jackie, lives in North Hollywood. Robert Dahdah has appeared as a character actor in numerous films, plays, and daytime soaps, and remains spry at age 74. He produces plays, hosts his local Manhattan cable TV show, *Chelsea Journal,* and is an archivist of the Caffé Chino. Hal Borske lives in Hell's Kitchen and makes ends meet as an office temp. "I never got a fan letter in my life," Hal says wistfully. "If you have some, or get any, pass them along."

In the wake of the destruction of the old Times Square, the progeny of the major exploitation movie players inherited the palaces that housed their parents' now closed businesses, which they've sold. After Chelly Wilson's death, her daughter Bondi sold the Eros and Venus to developers, who transformed them into tourist trap restaurants. Jerry Balsam's son has invested in the new Times Square, putting money into Broadway plays.

When his Methuselah father died in 1997 at age 89, Lew Mishkin retreated from the film business to a private law practice in New Jersey, where his hatred of exploitation movies and his animosity towards Andy Milligan grew even greater. Lew rid himself of any reminders, trashing all the incredibly lurid Milligan ads his father had designed and melting down the prints of the "lost" Andy Milligan sexploitation features for their silver content. "I don't see why anyone thought Andy was talented," Lew seethed. "The sexploitation movies he made were even worse than his horror films. My dad had a way of marketing them that made them successful." Lew died of brain cancer on September 25, 2001, at age 60. Andy would have spat on Lew's grave.

Throughout the years, Andy has developed a legion of die-hard fans, beginning with the tenderloin audiences who found his horror movies unintentionally hilarious and his sex films bluntly on the mark. Andy's fans laud him for making some of the cheapest offbeat films in their genres. Most profoundly, Andy's work attracts people who feel at odds with society and who are confused about their own sexuality. He's proved an inspiration for today's do-it-yourself filmmakers.

Since Andy's death, his movies have become of even greater fascination to the exploitation film aficionados who have discovered him through home video. Sev-

eral of his movies, like *Gutter Trash,* haven't yet made it to the home screen, making the fans want to see them more than ever. Video companies, like ever-hopeful prospectors, sift through prints purchased in bulk and untitled from closed grindhouses. There's always the slim chance that the lost films will resurface, somehow. After all, Andy loved being watched.

# four
# The Anco Does a Gendertwist

**The Anco was the raunchiest, most dilapidated Deuce grindhouse of them all.** Located right off the southeast corner of 42nd Street and 8th Avenue, in creepy proximity to the Port Authority Bus Terminal, its floors were sticky from spilled soda, smuggled-in malt liquors, and bodily fluids of all varieties. The sound system was nearly inaudible no matter where you sat, it was hot in the summer, and the bad odor from the neighboring scumatorium was nearly inescapable.

At the Anco you'd base your seating choice on avoidance—a hellhole for decades, its filthy, broken chairs were a haven for a host of area criminals. Keep your eye out and you'd see needy closet cases searching for desperate rough trade. Predominately white and frequently upscale professionals like lawyers, these tricks earned a reputation for being obnoxious and unpleasant. The hustlers who hung around at the Anco—trade that existed to finance their next blackout—were often killing time before starting their midnight-to-eight shifts at nearby all-male theaters. Latino junkies on the lam after a quick strongarm robbery slumped in the aisles, enjoyed their nods relatively undisturbed. Professional black Deuce criminals—men who stole credit cards, pickpocketed wallets, and burned suburbanites with phony drug deals—also hid out, knowing no tourist would ever lead the cops in here. A back door led to an alley that connected the rest of the Deuce grindhouses on the south side of 42nd Street, so a pickpocket could easily make it from one theater to the next if he was being pursued—thus the prevalence of this crime around the Deuce.

The Anco's management was well aware that it sat on a nest of rotted eggs. The same ticket buyers often turned up at the theater several times a week, so they appreciated its frequent changes of programming. Ultraviolent horror

movies like *The Toolbox Murders* and extreme Eurosleaze giallos like *Slaughter Hotel* (see chapter 9) were shown with tax-write-off foreign spy movies such as *Orders to Kill,* which had daylong runs so their distributors could show them as bookkeeping losses. Gendertwist movies fleshed out the Anco's eccentric programming.

Drag queens have always been a focal point of real-life terroristic drama in the tenderloin. They're ubiquitous as hookers, and as the "wives" of area rough trade hustlers, they're the most violent individuals to haunt Times Square—cross them and they'll pull a switchblade out of their purse or padded bras. Lives of confused sexuality consistently sparked the imagination of exploitation filmmakers, and the Anco became the Deuce's central gendertwist showcase.

The drunken grandpa of 'em all was Edward D. Wood Jr. and his film *Glen or Glenda* (1953). *Olga* producer George Weiss funded the movie to cash in on the tabloid hoopla surrounding Christine Jorgensen's then still-recent sex change operation. Instinctively knowing its fetish value, Weiss would periodically rerelease the movie. It played the Deuce under the sexploitational moniker *I Changed My Sex* from the early to the mid-1960s.

*Glen or Glenda* provided emotional catharsis for its alcoholic, cross-dressing auteur, who made the film with all the love in his pickled, broken heart. Wood used the standard *Mom and Dad* roadshow format of a psychiatrist focusing in on two cases that are reenacted for our shock, education, and pleasure. The primary case is Glen, a model of normalcy except for his secret desire to dress in wigs, black-lace nighties, and his fiancée's soft, sweet angora sweaters. The doctor's other case study is a hermaphrodite who bravely undergoes a sex-change operation to make him a fully functional female. Interspersed throughout Wood's dirty sex setup are scenes of Bela Lugosi giving cryptic narration; stock footage of soldiers marching, airplanes flying, and cars on freeways; and $1.98 Buñuel dream sequences. *Glen or Glenda* has a peaceful, full-of-hope landing, with Glen's fiancée lovingly and slavishly accepting his kink: She hands him the angora sweater right off her back.

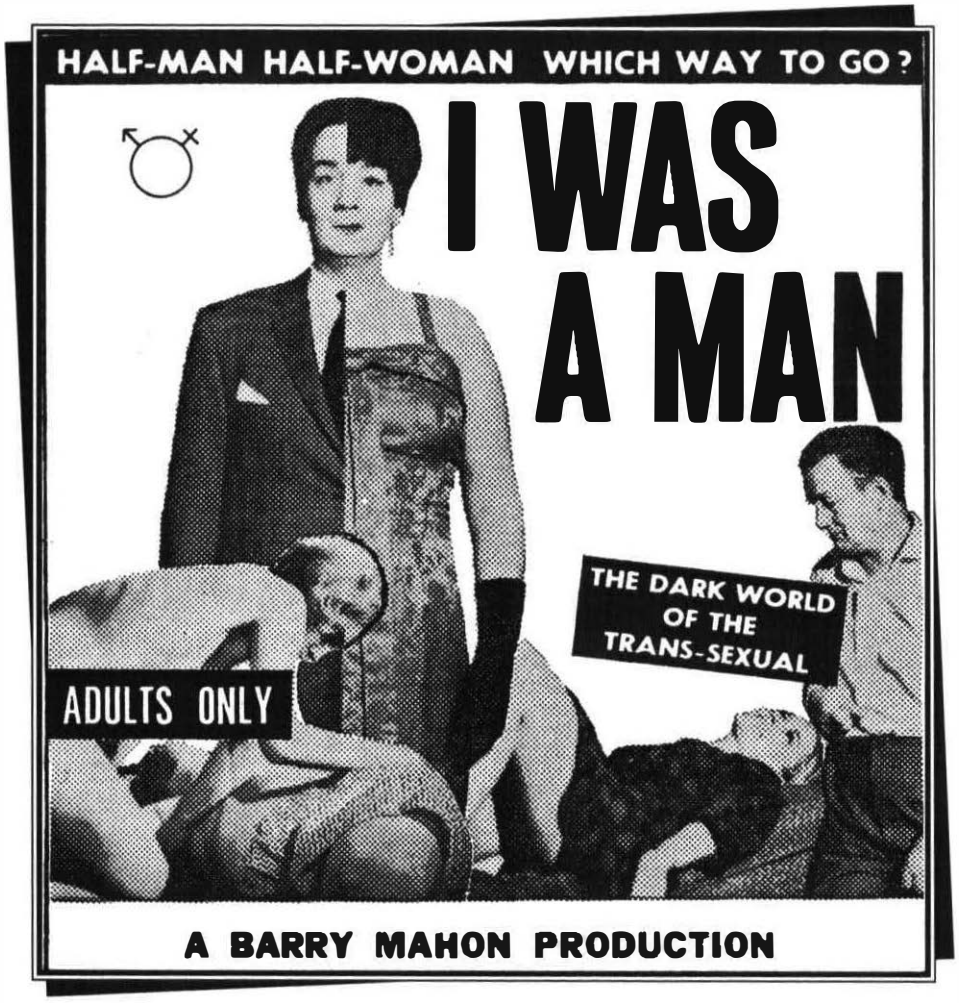
Parts of *Glen or Glenda* have more in common with the roadshow movie ethos exemplified by *Chained for Life* and *Marijuana, the Devil's Weed* than they do with the exploitation sex-change epics it spawned. Ed Wood's ode to himself is far from the nadir of bad taste and unintended hilarity for which pretentious crit-

*The Christine Jorgensen Story*'s theory of gendertwist: prissy actor, monkey, tranny Jorgensen. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)

ics have canonized it. In sadistic form, critics such as conservative religionist Michael Medved would make fun of Wood, deeming his film a "golden turkey," but in fact the film offers a convenient way for critics like Medved—who ordinarily wouldn't consider exploitation movies at all—to exploit a fetish they'd otherwise look down upon.

Wood ultimately paid the price of wrangling his fantasies. He never had enough money to live on, and was so nerve-wracked and hysterical that he needed to drink every waking hour. Wood made pennies churning out quickie cross-dressing dirty paperbacks. He was continuously and unceremoniously evicted from cheapshit apartments, his meager possessions routinely tossed in the garbage by angry landlords. Wood lived a miserable, tear-streaked life, and it's a tribute to his dedicated soul that *Glen or Glenda* was made at all.

Throughout the softcore 1960s, other gendertwist peculiarities followed.




Sexploitation king Barry Mahon's take on gendertwist. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection, courtesy Something Weird Video)

Barry Mahon, whose oeuvre of almost forty films includes every form of 1960s sexploitation, made his contribution to the gendertwist genre with *I Was a Man* (1967). Mahon compared his movies to Model-T's, and would rationally explain their fixed formulas and cost-and-profit ratios. Earlier, this Henry Ford of exploitation had directed the decaying Errol Flynn's last feature, the sleazy *Cuban Rebel Girls* (1959).

In *I Was a Man,* the movie's hermaphrodite protagonist feels mostly female but struggles to act the male role. After joining the Merchant Marine and putting

up with sex-crazed girlfriends, our troubled protagonist travels to Finland over Christmas for a sex-change operation that transforms he-she from an old effete queen into a dowdy but happy butch woman. Mahon sticks to his lurid exploitation blueprints by throwing in titty-shaking belly dances to satisfy any fans who'd showed up for a sex spectacle.

A wonderful mid-1960s sexploitational gendertwist movie is Bob Clark's *The She Man* (1967). Clark later made some effective forays into low-budget horror, including the widely seen drive-in hit *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things,* but he's most known for the teen-marketed smut cornball retro-1950s *Porky's* films that were popular in the early 1980s. *The She Man* was Clark's earliest effort and extremely different from his later work.

The movie's credits unfold as a transvestite transforms out of drag in silhouette behind a screen. The story begins with a psychiatrist's lecture about our hero, Albert Rose, the archetypal skirt chaser from a monied family who showed up in several 1960s exploitation movies. Albert, a senator's son, is introduced poolside at a cabana table, nervously opening and closing his legs. He receives a troubling telegram and is flown by private plane to Florida, where a Mercedes drives him down a deserted road lined with palm trees. In a dark room, he's confronted by tape recordings that accuse him of bribing his way out of a cowardice charge during the Korean War. The shame has begun.

Dominita, a severe drag queen blackmailer, demands a year from Albert's life plus $20,000 cash immediately. As Dominita, actor Dorian Wayne is every bit the sharp, perceptive, sadistic Bill Ward cartoon of the stiletto-heeled, hairbunned, terroristic 1950s bitch, setting a standard that has never been cinematically reproduced with such intensity and finesse.

Albert is brought to Dominita's lair, which is guarded by a fat, shoeless Mr. Clean in women's silk Oriental cocktail pajamas and earrings. There, we learn that Albert is to be transformed into Dominita's *personal* maid, complete with new femme name: "Rose Albert." Female hormone pills are prescribed. Linda, a girl whom Dominita has blackmailed after catching her in a lesbian embrace, is to supervise Albert's transformation.

Together, Linda and Albert become Dominita's undoing. Albert realizes he enjoys cross-dressing and wins Linda's heart with his honesty. "I could see a doctor and go back to normal. We can get out of here. . . . I could just dress up at

home!" Through accepting his internal femininity and by finding a woman who will accept him even at his weakest, most humiliated moment, Albert is able to assert himself as a man. He, in turn, has no problem with his new sweetie's experimentation with lesbianism.

While Dominita tans by the pool, Albert sees a familiar scar on her leg that jogs his memory. He photographs it while Dominita's eyes are closed, shielded from the sun. With the photo for proof, Albert reveals to his fellow blackmail victims that Dominita is really Dominick, an army deserter with an incriminating war wound. In the end, the slaves angrily converge on Dominita like the mutants at the end of *Freaks,* reducing their captor to a skinny, wigless, cowering male mess. *The She Man* ends with Albert and Linda visiting the shrink who opened the movie. The good doctor gives them a pep talk about how cross-dressing within a fulfilling relationship can be the ticket to pure sexual pleasure.

*The She Man* is composed of bizarre set pieces, including one in which topless female dancers in gargantuan hats and tuxedo pants perform a surreal dance at Dominita's birthday worship party. The cast is perfect, with no one mocking their roles, no matter how beyond the pale. It's astonishing that Clark found such an offbeat cast in the remote nothing swamp area of Florida, where he filmed—at this time in cinema, most people expected to find such fascinating extremists only at Andy Warhol's Factory in New York. The black-and-white photography is sharp and crisp, and the film holds up through repeated viewings. Thematically, the film sets up an interesting dichotomy between cross-dressing as an acceptable heterosexual kink and its perversion into a criminal's twisted quest for power. Whatta film—the best gendertwister ever. After you see it, you can forgive Clark for *Porky's.*

In 1970, United Artists tried its own gendertwist experiment, releasing *The Christine Jorgensen Story,* which was critically panned but sidesplittingly fine for the Anco audience. Made by Irving Rapper, who had previously directed mainstream Bette Davis dreck, the movie reenacts the celebrated story of George Jorgensen, who goes from childhood sissyboy to confused postadolescent to the brave adult who became the world's first famous sex change. With its roadshow approach, the movie achieves the aesthetic of an animated *National Enquirer* story.

The film's leading actor, John Hansen, was a wannabe matinee idol who crafts

the role of Christine into a case of studied prissiness. At one point, an eligible gay bachelor makes a pass at him and he flees in a state of confusion, an hysterical he-virgin. When he's finally transformed into an anatomical female, Hansen looks like a college football player jammed into drag. The special effect highlight appears when Hansen's head is surrealistically superimposed over a full-breasted female torso to indicate the transformation. The Anco audience cracked up.

In the early 1970s, Cinerama Releasing produced a number of bizarre starvehicles oddities for actors needing quick bucks, like the neo-*Classics Illustrated* Richard Burton version of *Bluebeard* and the Taylor-Burton obscurity *Hammersmith Is Out.* In 1972, Cinerama distributed the British gendertwist import *I Want What I Want.*

*I Want What I Want* features a depressed protagonist named Roy, a man who compulsively dresses in drag. When everyone starts taking him as a biological female, a sex-change operation looms as a necessity. In the end, Roy deals personally with his agonizing double life in a shadow-concealed scene of self-castration.

Insistently tasteful and serious, and directed without exploitation flair by John Dexter, the film emerges as too slow and restrained, but still has its moments. In the lead role, all credit goes to the incredible Anne Heywood, who previously had given masterful performances in *The Fox* and in kinky Eurosleaze nunsploitation classics like *The Nuns of Saint Archangelo.* As a pre-op, Heywood does a fascinating turn, giving the uncanny impression that she has an actual penis. In addition to the cutting ending, the film's peeks at Roy's daily rituals for fighting his masculinity hold interest. Ultimately, the film's empathy, transformation scenes, and Heywood's amazing star turn make *I Want What I Want* a minor classic of the genre, if its least humorous.

Taking a different approach was the gendertwist classic *Let Me Die a Woman,* (1978; Deuce opening 1980) which premiered at the Anco in summer 1980 for a four-day run. Director Doris Wishman was known for her dilapidated black-and-white 60s roughies like *Bad Girls Go to Hell* and the misery-ridden Chesty Morgan big-bust freakshows *Deadly Weapons* and *Double Agent 73.* A headache-inducing study in bad film aesthetics, *Let Me Die a Woman* is a Mondo-styled hodgepodge hosted by a "Dr." Leo Wollman, who resembles a skid row panhandler more than any medical specialist. (Nevertheless, a wall of degrees introduces him as an MD, shrink, *and* theologian.) Wollman provides the requisite socially redeeming com-

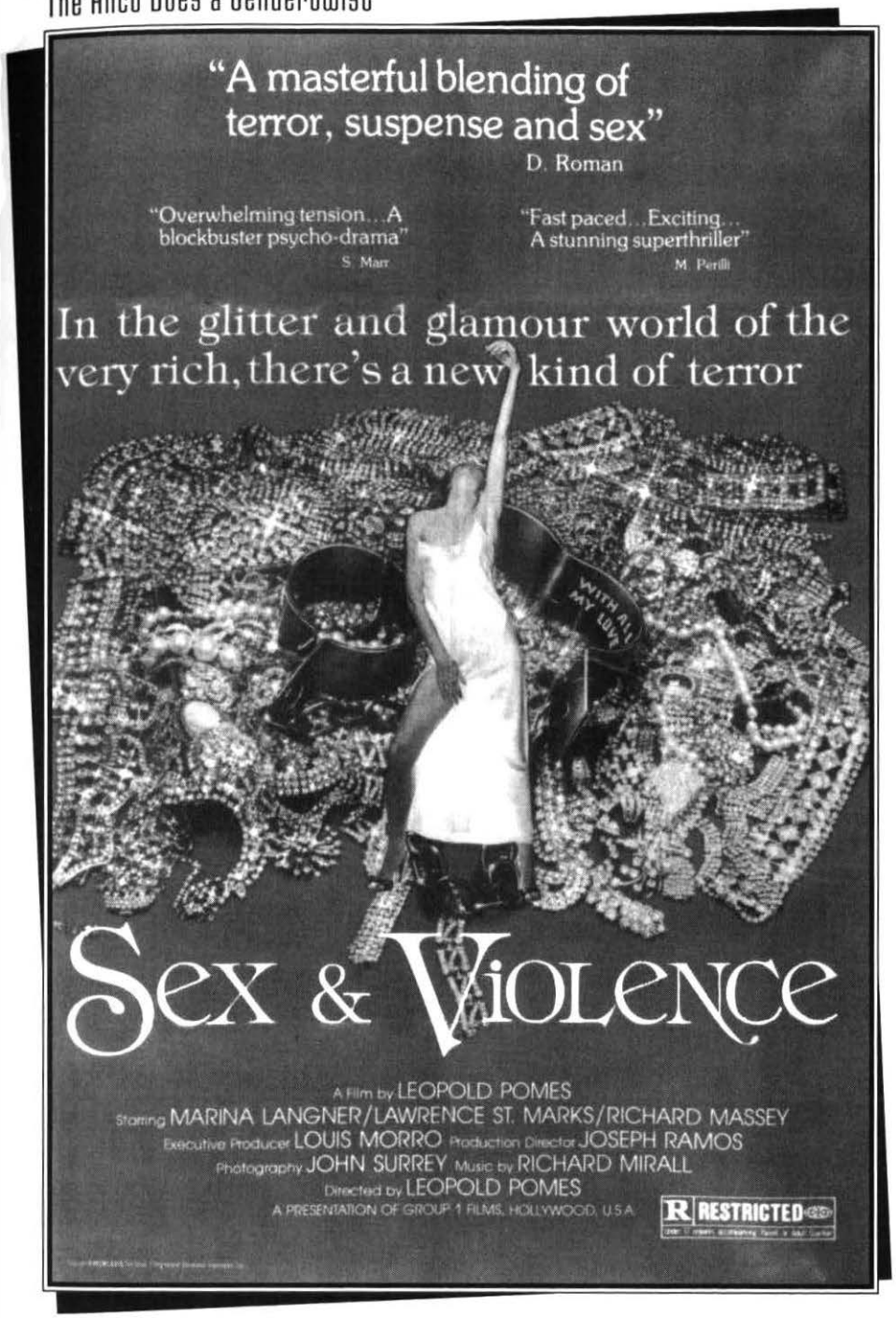
mentary as he uses his metal pointer to highlight the unwanted appendages on posing, limp-dicked pre-op males. He also presents a few women who cross-dress as men, and holds a group therapy session for various gendertwists, including black street queens recruited right off 8th Avenue.

In a gendertwist coincidence, a pickup scene in Central Park features a pre-op with the same actor who plays Dusty's first trick in Andy Milligan's gendertwist meditation, *Fleshpot on 42nd Street* (see chapter 3). After some softcore bedroom antics, the camera pans in slow motion to the pre-op removing its panties to reveal a shriveled cock. The rest of *Let Me Die a Woman* is a cheap cut-and-paste of film clips ranging from hetero pre-mustached Harry Reems quarter peep-booth loops to a brief, jarring simulated self-castration to several bloody views of sex-change operations. An intermittently revealing interview with a real life post-op is intercut.

A stylistic throwback to roadshow sex instruction films, the film was released through a makeshift distributor calling itself Hygiene Films, which was really a front for another one of Chelly Wilson's distributing enterprises. (Chelly maintained a primary company called Variety, but used the moniker "Hygiene" to get the film played as a documentary that would not require an MPAA rating in certain territories.) Surprisingly, for such a no-budget operation, the film even had a tie-in book that was sold in adult bookstores all along the Deuce.

Like Doris Wishman's other films, the movie is the real study in bad film aesthetics that champions usually attribute to *Glen or Glenda.* It's randomly shot, haphazardly edited, has elements of freak exploitation, and incorporates a great deal of old stock footage. The no-budget sets induce a unique, stifling claustrophobia. Unfortunately, *Let Me Die a Woman* has such an ugly, unpleasant aura that it's almost entirely devoid of even unintentional hilarity. It's a movie that was truly in its element at the Anco, although its only viewers were a few disoriented inner city denizens. Since no one else would record its existence, review it, or even admit to having seen it, the film kicked off the first issue of *Sleazoid Express.* The film has grown in stature over the years, boosted in popularity by increasing cult interest in Wishman's work. Several companies carry it on home video, where it's also known as *Man Into Woman.*

In 1983, the gendertwist mindfuck of all time, the bluntly titled *Sex and Violence,* had a successful run on the Deuce, bouncing from the Liberty to the Anco to


"A masterful blending of terror, suspense and sex"
D. Roman
"Overwhelming tension...A blockbuster psycho-drama"
S. Marr
"Fast paced...Exciting... A stunning superthriller"
M. Perilli
In the glitter and glamour world of the very rich, there's a new kind of terror
WITH ALL MY LOVE
Sex & Violence
A Film by LEOPOLD POMES
Starring MARINA LANGNER/LAWRENCE ST. MARKS/RICHARD MASSEY
Executive Producer LOUIS MORRO Production Director JOSEPH RAMOS
Photography JOHN SURREY Music by RICHARD MIRALL
Directed by LEOPOLD POMES
A PRESENTATION OF GROUP 1 FILMS, HOLLYWOOD, U.S.A.
R RESTRICTED

A Eurosleaze gendertwist treat. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)

the Roxy, a video projection house, where it remained a frequent toss-on. *Sex and Violence* is a 1977 import from the now defunct Group 1, a company that specialized in foreign films with an S&M bent. A legitimate distributor, Almi, was reviving it, although the company was too embarrassed to put its name on the credits.

Slow pictorial elegance reveals a wealthy man fetishizing his wife, putting her photos together in books and flipping through them frequently. The wife, however, treats her husband somewhat like a slave. While he responds appreciatively, we smell his underlying resentment.

The couple embarks on a boat outing in the Mediterranean, complete with champagne and caviar. Curiously, the husband permits a loud, boorish couple to come aboard, and they immediately prove to be trouble. They bully and verbally abuse the wife and bind the husband into a wheelchair so he can watch his wife's humiliation. In a twist, the female transgressor reveals herself to be a drag queen, while her male counterpart is a drag-lover/destructive-hustler type. After they torture the wife and force the husband to urinate on her, a hackneyed trick ending reveals that the husband had actually *hired* the sadistic couple: The ordeal was all pre-arranged.



*Sex and Violence* was a groundbreaking movie in the gendertwist genre. The revelatory scene in which the drag queen pulls down her bikini bottom to show cock is a classic in twisted voyeurism. Although not up to its monumental title—how could it be?—*Sex and Violence* remains an entertaining Eurosleaze take on gendertwisting, one that consistently engrossed Deuce audiences who saw it on double bills with the Mondo movie *Jabberwalk* (see chapter 7). It's one of the genre's most unique and best-executed films.



While the gendertwist films that played the Anco constituted a small and uneven genre, they were never either total bores or complete wastes. In one way or another, they delivered their promise to the audience and exemplified the exploitation technique of playing to sensationalism while dressing up in the fake guise of sincerity.

# five
# Race Relations Within the Empire

**A leftover from the Minsky's days, the Empire Theater was a palatial space in the** best Deuce grindhouse tradition, with a huge screen and two balconies where the seats were a little on the broken-springy side, but had great views. The second balcony was especially steep: You feared that if you slid on some spilled soda, you'd go flying over the rails to the seats below. Roman-style columns and unused opera seats lent the place a ragged elegance.

**"Black Man . . . Don't Let the Sun Set on You in This Town"**

—catch-line for *I Spit on Your Grave*

The Empire had a raunchy reputation for male hustling during the 1960s *Midnight Cowboy* era, but by the 1970s enough Times Square adult theaters had opened to satisfy quickie sex freaks. Thus, as the decade took hold, a growing audience flocked to the Empire for the onscreen entertainment rather than for action in the aisles or toilets, and the theater became a prime venue for the great three-day-run triple bills so endemic to the Deuce. As a plus, these bills showed dozens of trailers and occasionally an old short, such as a fifteen-minute documentary on stock car or horseracing. A fella selling Dixie Cup ice creams occasionally patrolled the aisles, catering to a weed-smoking crowd that was hungry for sweets.

The naked spectacle of a white man screaming racial epithets at blacks always made 42nd Street prick up its ears. The racial tensions that swept America throughout the 1960s and 1970s were refracted in race-hate exploitation movies, whose earmarks were explicit violence, brutal sex, and outpourings of forbidden vulgarisms. The Empire was their premier 42nd Street showcase.

Race-hate movies are propelled by their stereotypes, which occupy a totally different universe from the pimps, players, and private eyes of blaxploitation. African Americans in race-hate movies run the gamut from pacifist martyrs and

slaves to female and male sexual receptacles. The whites are often male crackers who are obsessed in a closety way with black men and their sexual prowess. White male sexual frustration mounts until it explodes into sadism, which pushes forward the films' narratives.

Before Radley Metzger made his distinctive contributions to Eurosleaze, his company Audubon Films was releasing what he later called "bread and butter pictures"—basic exploitation product that had a guaranteed profit margin. In 1961, Metzger acquired a French adaptation of a then-risqué Boris Vian novel about the sexual adventures of a biracial man who passes for white in the racist American south. Released by Metzger stateside as *I Spit on Your Grave,* the film provided the basic template for the 1960s race-hate movie that would follow. In characteristic fashion, it opens with the lynching of the hero's black brother, which ends with the corpse being set ablaze. After fleeing this bad scene, the hero (Christian Marquand) embarks on a series of affairs with Southern belles.



*I Spit on Your Grave* was followed quickly by Roger Corman's seminal race-hate movie *The Intruder* (1961). With an eye on the domestic front, Corman intended to make an exploitation quickie about the trouble integration was brewing in the south, but he got more than he bargained for: To his dismay, not many theaters in his distribution network wanted to play a film that used the word "nigger" every few seconds. Years later, Corman called *The Intruder* the only film he regretted making.

Disappointed at the film's box office results, Corman sold the film to Mike Ripps, one of the masters of the exploitation ad campaign. Ripps was occupied with repackaging *Bayou,* a 1957 film he bought back from United Artists, as *Poor White Trash.* While Ripps heated the movie up with brief rape and gore scenes—along with an irresistibly lurid ad campaign—he needed a second feature to give the audience its money's worth. *The Intruder* proved the perfect topical ticket. Ripps retitled the film *Shame* for inner cities and *I Hate Your Guts* for the Southern drive-in crowd. For two old black-and-white retreads, the double bill was a powerful combo, and raked in cash for a decade, showing up periodically on the Deuce from 1961 to 1971.

William Shatner stars as Adam Cramer, an agitator for the "Patrick Henry Society" who arrives in a small Southern town with trouble in mind. The courts have

just ordered the schools integrated, and Cramer has been sent by his right-wing bully organization to stir up trouble. Once he arrives in town, he jumps in a cab and demands, "Take me to niggertown!" He gives speeches to cracker audiences, threatening them, giving them The Fear: "Niggers will become your mayors, your policemen—like they have already in New York City and Chicago—and will be the doctors delivering your babies *if they have the time*." In a Father Coughlin anti-semitic flourish, he goes on to accuse the NAACP of being a "Communist organization run by a Jew with ties to Moscow."

Cramer's evil machinations have instantaneous violent consequences. He participates in a Klan cross-burning that results in the murder of the saintly local black priest. A sympathetic white newspaperman walks a bunch of black kids to school, gets stomped by a group of rednecks, and wakes up in the hospital missing an eye. Cramer blackmails the newspaperman's teenage daughter into falsely accusing a black student of rape. The poor kid gets punched in the face, called "boy," and publicly humiliated. When he's just about to be lynched, the girl reveals the truth, exposing Cramer to all as a windbag and liar.

The film is an excellent example of Corman's strengths as a director, and is in fact superior to many of his big hits. The black-and-white, Sam Fuller–like tabloid style is gripping and the narrative moves along at a breakneck pace. The violence isn't graphic or gory, but it's jarring in its painful suddenness. And the blinding, overbright sun and Missouri locations are hellishly atmospheric.

As Cramer, Shatner is effective portraying the kind of oily, repugnant creep who even today still populates many hate groups—the type of white supremacist who acts smug and arrogant because he's better educated than your average redneck. By 1971, when *Shame* was doubling with *Poor White Trash* at the Empire, the image of Shatner as *Star Trek*'s Captain Kirk was inextricably burned in the Deuce audience's collective mind, so the surreal sight of him shrieking "nigger" was a sucker-punch shock amid the film's captivating melodramatics.

In 1965, Stan Borden—who brought us the *Olga* series, the early Findlay-Amero movies, and smutty, freakish sexploitation classics like *The Smut Peddler*—entered the race-hate market in Metzger fashion by acquiring a French film and retitling it *My Baby Is Black*. The movie is a beatnik-era romance between a white gal and a black fellow in Paris, punctuated with authentic baby-

birthing footage. *My Baby* played from its original release through the mid-1970s, drawing crowds at intense inner city spots like the grindhouses of bombed-out Newark, New Jersey.

As Stan recalled, "When we did *My Baby Is Black,* we did very good with it. It played all over. At that time it was big. Today it would be nothing. It's the timing with these things. The birth was at the end of the picture. I reversed the picture. I put it in front of the picture, then the titles, then built the sound up, and then the ambulance, and then it started with *My Baby Is Black.* The white girl goes to the hospital. They pull the baby out and you see this black baby. *My Baby Is Black.*" It proved to be an audience-grabbing shock opener.

Filmmaker/harem-keeper Ted Mikels also had a sense of timing and made his race-hate contribution with *The Black Klansman* (1966), aka *I Crossed the Color Line.* The half-black hero travels back to the South after he hears of his daughter being murdered by klansmen—and *in a church,* no less. He boldly infiltrates the KKK to extract revenge. Sexploitation teaser elements were in place with the formidable presence of big-bust magazine model Maureen "44D" Gaffney, who becomes romantically involved with the high-yellow hero. Even though it's a black-and-white film, Gaffney still registers as a classic buxom Irish redhead. Max Julien, later star of the blaxploitation pimp classic *The Mack,* has a small role here as a barroom troublemaker.

The successful revival of *Poor White Trash* and *Shame* in 1971 motivated some other distributors to bring back other mid-1960s films that dealt with racial taboos. Harry Goldstone, the irascible one-man-band New York City distributor, rereleased *High Yellow,* a 1965 movie by Texas auteur Larry Buchanan. It's a black-and-white melodrama with sexploitation leanings about the hang-ups and illicit affairs of a wealthy Dallas family as seen from the vantage point of their mulatto maid. Like *Shame,* the movie looked dated by the time of its revival, but managed to lure ticket buyers with an intriguing ad: For decorum's sake, the title supposedly couldn't be printed; thus, you'd have to call the theater to hear the beleaguered ticket taker say *High Yellow* over the phone.

Also released in 1971 was *Honky,* a popular film about a naïve blond white boy (John Neilson) whose black girlfriend (well played by Brenda Sykes) gets him mixed up in a pot-selling business. They're eventually forced to leave town over drug deals turned sour, which leads to the ugly, tragic climax: The sight of a bira-

The title that was so offensive you had to call the box office. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)

cial couple incites the sexual sadism of a bunch of rednecks, who realistically and explicitly gang-bang the heroine. At the end of the film, she's left crying in her boyfriend's arms.

*Honky* is sleazy slick in execution, down to its Quincy Jones soundtrack. Its soft-focus mixed-combo sex scenes went over particularly well on the Deuce, where the live equivalent was playing on various stages every hour-and-a-half. *Honky*'s considerable box office success was due in no small part to its newspaper ad campaign, which had the catchline "a love story of hate" illustrated by a crude drawing of the protagonists kissing. The movie's lobby poster featured the same drawing, but with a rendition of the brutal gang-bang in the background for extra oomph.

As the 1970s took hold, a slew of movies featuring graphic, politically motivated torture scenes—for example, *Brazil: A Report on Torture, The Case of the Nieves Brothers,* and Fernando Arrabal's surrealist *Viva la Muerte*—were playing the art house and midnight movie circuit all over New York. A late 1960s Italian import, *Black Jesus,* quickly became the Deuce's answer to this cinematic niche where exploitation, art, and politics intersected. When *Black Jesus* was submitted to the MPAA, all the members voted for an R rating except one, who wanted it rated X for violence. At that time, the MPAA's leading censor was Dr. Aaron Stern, a psychiatrist who had a particular animus against violent films. When asked to make a decision on the rating, he saw the film and declared: "*Black Jesus* is an X." The film was slightly recut for a PG rating by its small distributor, Plaza, who was desperate to escape the economic stigma of an X rating.

*Black Jesus* recasts the Christ story within a narrative based loosely on the martyrdom of African nationalist leader Patrice Lumumba. Its protagonist, Maurice Lalubi (Woody Strode) eludes the chaos of the war-torn Congo by moving like a phantom from village to village and preaching a message of passive resistance. By the end of the meetings, his audiences are willing to lay down their lives for him. Yet when Lalubi leaves, villages are destroyed and covered with posters offering a cash reward for his head.

A shrouded Judas figure betrays Lalubi's whereabouts to the Commandant, the military man hired by the puppet government to capture him. After another village is razed, a virtual SWAT team corners Lalubi in the house where he's hid-

ing. Unarmed, and clearly frightened, he offers the soldiers no resistance and walks to his martyrdom.

*Black Jesus* builds to an excruciating torture session. Lalubi's hands are nailed to a table as his screams echo throughout the prison where he's held captive. By the end, the half-dead political messiah is assassinated beside a thief, Oreste. As Lalubi, Woody Strode gives an audacious, full-scale portrait of a martyred militant; you believe that he walks in the shadow of death, and Strode captures the moral ambiguity of a pacifist who uses people as human shields. The supporting cast members—Jean Servais as the Commandant (familiar from many French gangster films) and Pasolini's main star Franco Citti as Oreste—are also superb. Director Valerio Zurlini executes the film with the intensity of a Sergio Leone western. He has an eye for detail that stays in the memory—a white soldier pointing a gun at a terrified naked black couple in bed, the strange conspiratorial grin Lalubi flashes his deathmate Oreste when he's first captured. As an exploitation movie, *Black Jesus*'s extreme violence and brutality make it a visceral cinematic experience.

The race-hate movie went Hollywood during the 1970s with tasteless big-budget plantation epics like *Mandingo* (1975) and *Drum* (1976), both of which became longtime Deuce staples. *Mandingo,* which opened in grand style at the gigantic Cinerama Theater, with a full gallery of graphic lobby cards and stills, was based on the first volume of the *Falconhurst* saga, Kyle Onstott's lengthy, best-selling historical novels that detail the inhumane and sexually abusive aspects of slavery. Its poster—a collage depicting ex-boxer Ken Norton being boiled in a pot by Perry King, James Mason using little black boys as footstools, and whippings and slave beatings—was wheatpasted all over Times Square subway stations. In a striking mixed-combo *Gone With the Wind* parody, prominent illustrations depicted Ken Norton holding Susan George and Perry King with his arms around Brenda Sykes. A variation on the poster appeared as the print-ad campaign used in daily newspapers, but was toned down quickly, with the offending images of the boiling, beatings, and child footstools airbrushed away.

Nelson Lyon—director of the 1971 masterpiece *The Telephone Book*—edited *Mandingo*'s unforgettable trailer, which climaxes with Perry King demanding, "Get in that pot!" and Ken Norton retorting "*No* massah." "I couldn't believe my

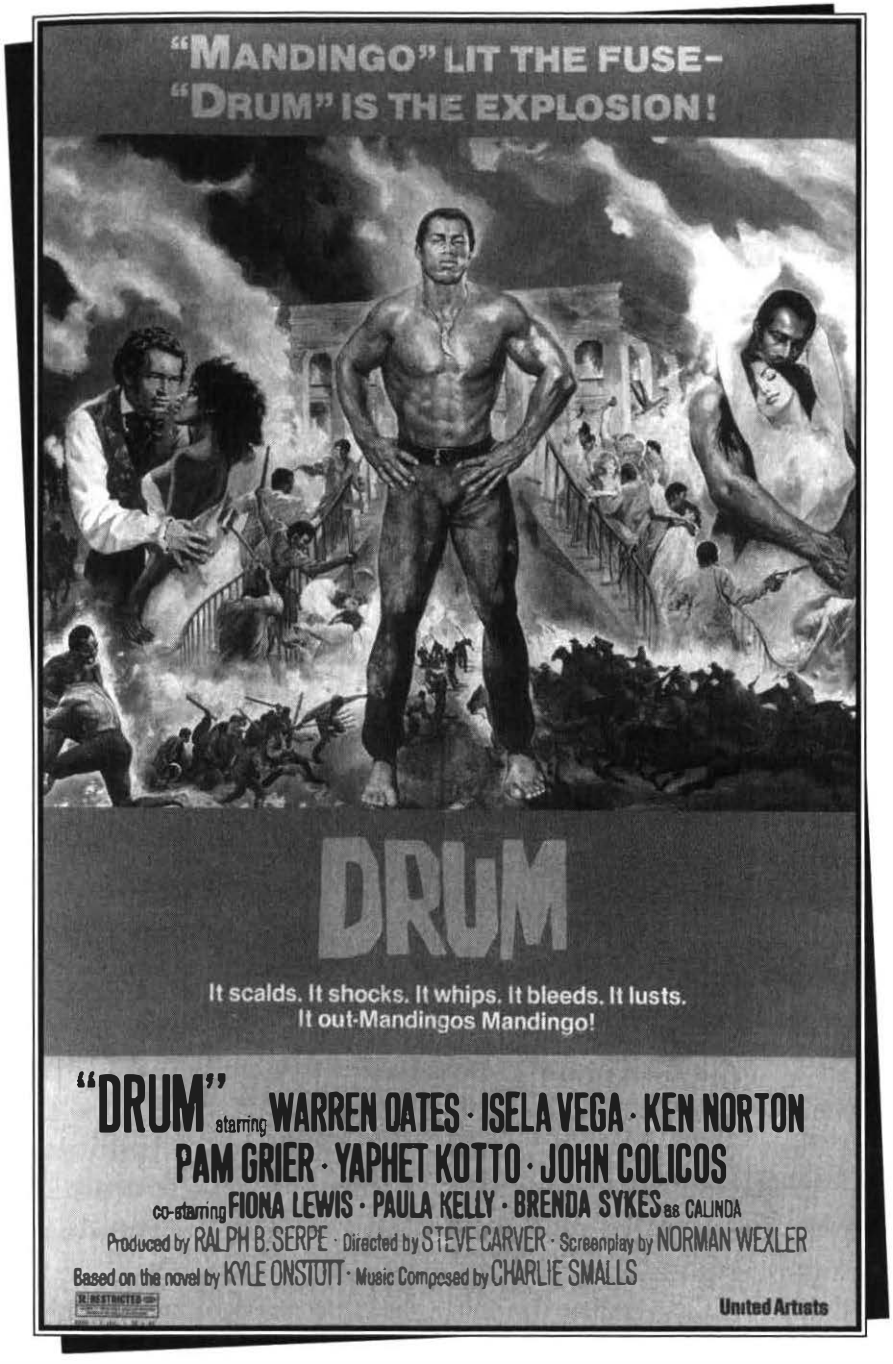
eyes!" bellows Lyon, remembering the film. "The scene where he boils the guy in the pot! Even in black-and-white, because you're using a work print to cut the trailer from, it was still shocking. A Hollywood movie never went so far!" Lyon laughs. *"My God!"*

*Mandingo* has more in common with a low-budget Bob Cresse S&M sex western than with anything released by a major studio. The setting looks less like a plantation than someone's dusty garage in Georgia. Scenes of Ken Norton fucking Susan George register like a softcore version of Ivory Snow girl Marilyn Chambers with black stud Johnny Keyes in *Behind the Green Door.* Perry King, playing Susan's husband, has a limp that symbolizes the impotence of white men. Once the black man fucks his white woman, he has to be annihilated.

James Mason is tipsy looking as the master of Falconhurst, whose only complaint is that you can't cook up and eat slaves for dinner once they're no longer useful as workers. Scenes of him "draining" his rheumatism by resting his feet on the chests of little black boys remain some of the most appalling images of child abuse ever seen in a Hollywood film. And he claimed that *Lolita* embarrassed him?

Indeed, *Mandingo* is so insulting that during one Empire showing, it prompted an agonized black viewer to demand, "All you white people outta this here audience!" But there is nothing heroic about any of the characters in the film, black or white. The black characters are all there to be abused, violated, and killed in a myriad of ways by whites who have no guilt or morals whatsoever. Yet *Mandingo*'s ample quantities of sex, violence, racism, and sadism made it a Deuce mainstay, ensuring that it played for years as a second feature. After a time, the audience become as desensitized to the film as if it were wallpaper.

*Drum* is the second *Falconhurst* adaptation, essentially *Son of Mandingo,* and is unpretentious in its exploitation approach, featuring many scenes of slave auctions. Warren Oates giddily cavorts with topless buxom cuties in hoop skirts, and John Colicos plays a flaming faggot slave trader with an overbaked French accent and a Mapplethorpian eye for the hero, Drum, played again by *Mandingo*'s star, Ken Norton. Fortunately for Drum, Colicos always gets outbid at auctions. After an hour and a half of unwanted flirting and sexual threats, Norton crushes Colicos's testicles as an enormous close-up of the latter's agonized face fills the screen. The columns in the Empire Theater were practically shaking from the gales of laughter that erupted at this literally ball-breaking climax.


"MANDINGO" LIT THE FUSE-
"DRUM" IS THE EXPLOSION!
DRUM
It scalds. It shocks. It whips. It bleeds. It lusts.
It out-Mandingos Mandingo!
"DRUM" starring WARREN OATES · ISELA VEGA · KEN NORTON
PAM GRIER · YAPHET KOTTO · JOHN COLICOS
co-starring FIONA LEWIS · PAULA KELLY · BRENDA SYKES as CALINDA
Produced by RALPH B. SERPE · Directed by STEVE CARVER · Screenplay by NORMAN WEXLER
Based on the novel by KYLE ONSTOTT · Music Composed by CHARLIE SMALLS
R RESTRICTED
United Artists

Hollywood race hate: *Drum*, son of *Mandingo*. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)

Of course, smelling money, other major studios followed with their own race-hate movies. *The Klansman* (1975) starred a rum-soaked Richard Burton as a Southerner and O. J. Simpson as a sheriff, but the strangest and most racist by far was *Man Friday* (1975), a retelling of the Robinson Crusoe story from Friday's point of view.

Peter O'Toole, seemingly in the midst of a drunken blackout, plays Crusoe to Richard Roundtree's Friday, and both leads' own personas override their characters. O'Toole is the ugly, drunken, racist bloke. Roundtree was still known to the Deuce audience from his role as the supercool superspade private eye *Shaft* (1971), but the *Shaft* series had reached its peak and Roundtree had been reduced to appearing in oddities like the black western *Charley One-Eye* (1973). He probably assumed that appearing opposite an internationally known British star would increase his bankability, but he surely had no idea what indignities were in store for him.



Most of the movie consists of O'Toole bellowing "Friday!" and Roundtree shining, cocking his head, smiling, and shouting back "Master!" At one point O'Toole wakes up sexually stimulated from a "dream about a woman's body." Roundtree grins coyly and says, "But I have a body, *too,* Master." "Oh, Friday, you're a savage," harrumphs O'Toole.



Predictably, *Man Friday* reduced Roundtree's career to a shambles for many years—*The New York Times* compared his performance to Lassie the dog—while O'Toole went on to up the ante and appear in *Caligula.* Unfortunately, *Man Friday* is more amusing as an anecdote than it is to actually sit through. The Deuce audience had a surprising tolerance for inertia, uncovering humor even in small details of sluggish movies, but *Man Friday* tested their patience: 115 minutes. Despite slick production values, it's as repetitive as a tire stuck in the sand, plays like a high school production with sand thrown on stage, and is as maddening as listening to a drunk on Christopher Street recount his daydreams after ten too many fifty-cent margaritas. After a quick Deuce run the film had a brief second life as a second feature, then faded into obscurity.

Despite a few entries from the majors, race hate continued to be a genre for independents. Like *Shame, The Black Bunch* (1976) was known under multiple titles, including *The Bad Bunch, Tom,* and most outrageously, *Nigger Lover.*

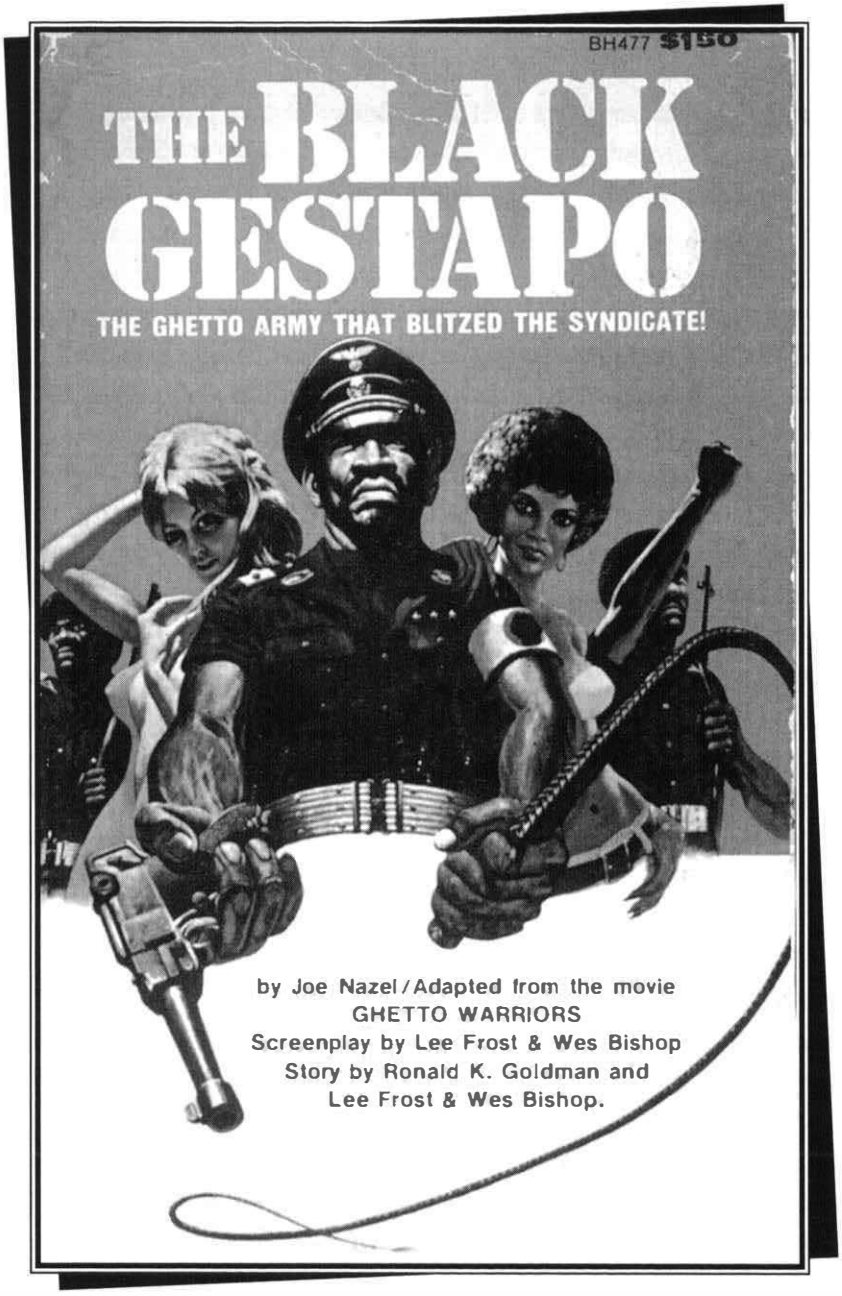
Opening with a theme song declaring "honky mother . . . you ain't no soul brother," *Nigger Lover* is a race-hate movie with a bizarre element of Jimmy Carter--era liberalism. It's an engrossing low-budgeter, with the requisite amount of sex, violence, and racial expletives, shot on the fly against a backdrop of bombed-out sections of L.A.

Veteran exploitation director Greydon Clark does his own star turn as the white protagonist whose black army buddy was killed in 'Nam. When Clark travels to Watts to bring the news to his dead friend's brother, Tom, he's given a hostile reception by Tom's gang of Afro-haired, dashiki-clad welfare layabouts. While they sport back-to-Africa monikers and proclaim that they're liberating their community from the scourge of the white man, they're actually up to their noses in crime. Inexplicably, Clark keeps trying to relate to this segment of the black community, but with a naturally disastrous outcome.

Jock Mahoney and Aldo Ray play two racist-pig detectives who exacerbate things by busting heads. When Clark makes another futile attempt to befriend the militants, Mahoney and Ray punch him out too, spitting out, "That's one nigger lover who's going to get himself killed." Ultimately, Tom shoots Clark to death at his wedding. Beating Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* postscript to the punch by nearly a decade, the movie concludes with side-by-side quotes from Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. After its initial run in the 1970s, the film was revived at the Roxy video grindhouse in the mid-1980s to a confused crowd who couldn't understand Clark's ill-fated search for acceptance. "Is he some kinda fag?" questioned one candid brother sitting in the theater's hard-plastic folding chairs.

In an even more aggressive vein, *The Black Gestapo* (1975) is like an acid trip through the mind of a white supremacist, complete with Nazi flourishes. Indeed, its credits unfold to newsreel footage of Hitler. Cut to contemporary Watts, where white Italian mobsters shake down black pimps, gamblers, numbers runners, and pushers by smashing their TVs and calling them "sambo" when then don't pay up. The guido mob boss is a skinny guy in a bad toupee who's given to bon mots like, "I came to L.A. for sunshine. I could have had Harlem."

General Ahmed, a beret-sporting Panther type, runs the People's Army, which tries to help out ghetto residents with detoxes and free food, but struggles to exist on small grants. After the mobsters badly beat two of his men and rape his


BH477 $1.50
THE BLACK GESTAPO
THE GHETTO ARMY THAT BLITZED THE SYNDICATE!
by Joe Nazel / Adapted from the movie
GHETTO WARRIORS
Screenplay by Lee Frost & Wes Bishop
Story by Ronald K. Goldman and
Lee Frost & Wes Bishop.

Paperback tie-in book for the race-hate movie *The Black Gestapo*—L.A.'s Hollywood House, known for releasing authors like Iceberg Slim and Donald Goines, put out a flock of these in the mid-1970s. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)

girlfriend, Ahmed enlists some local black criminals and starts using force against his foes. Under the tutelage of an evil pimp, the People's Army dons stormtrooper-like outfits and succeed in driving out the white mobsters, but then end up replacing them as the ghetto's shakedown artists. When General Ahmed learns of how his original mission has become twisted, he sets out to take down the rogue pimp.

To call *The Black Gestapo* action-packed would be an understatement. It uses the roughie template that director R. L. Frost and producer Wes Bishop (who also play small roles as mobsters) developed when they brought Bob Cresse's S&M psychodramas to life. Every few minutes there's a violent punchout, shooting, or bloody death, including the castration of one white mobster in his bathtub. The movie climaxes with a hand-to-hand death match between General Ahmed and the pimp, staged in a swimming pool. The sex in the movie is prurient and pornographically minded, ranging from standard black-on-black bedroom activity to interracial gang-bangs, along with brutal roughie elements like nude women getting socked in the face. A silent Uschi Digart does her human dirty playing card act, flashing her tit out the window of a moving car on the L.A. freeway and turning up topless in bed next to the evil pimp. The overdubbed inclusion of "Sieg Heil" as the pimp says, "You have done well, my warriors," is one of the most bizarre and hilarious interludes in the race-hate genre.

An authentic piece of Hollywood Boulevard grime, *The Black Gestapo* approaches unintentional satire but delivers the roughie goods, and was a solid Empire hit, its relentless, outrageous bad taste appealing to both the inner city audience and racist whites. It even boasted a movie tie-in book from the ghetto paperback publisher Holloway House, and later became something of an oral myth when pulled from circulation after its notorious distributor, Bryanston Pictures, went out of business (see chapter 3).

Released around the same time, *Three the Hard Way* (1974) has a similar Nazi obsession. White villains with swastika-like armbands are trying to develop a chemical that would poison only blacks when dumped into city water supplies, and are holding blacks prisoner for use in human experiments. Action stars Jim Brown, Jim Kelly, and Fred Williamson are sent to the rescue. Unfortunately, the movie doesn't have the balls of *The Black Gestapo* in living up to its bad-taste potential, but has its entertaining moments, plus a soundtrack by the velour soul

band The Impressions. *Three* had the benefit of major studio distribution, and remained a perennial Empire second feature through the early 1980s, despite having played on local TV.

One of the strangest race-hate psychodramas surfaced on 42nd Street in the freezing January of 1981 as *Black Vengeance* (1976; Deuce opening 1981), and the audience didn't know *what* to make of it. The freezing cold outside kept people in their seats, but they stared at the screen bewildered. The dialogue was almost inaudible, as the depth of the grindhouse turned the echo of the film's muddy sound back on itself, and the on-screen sexual events were freaky even for the Deuce. Years later, on video, the movie holds up as one of the most warped and inspired of the race-hate movies.

Originally made in 1976 as *Poor Pretty Eddie,* the film is also known as *Redneck County Rape* and *Heartbreak Motel.* Its cast is curious, all right, featuring such legitimate names as Leslie Uggams, Shelley Winters, and Slim Pickins, but the criminal element that created the film is even more curious. Director Richard Robinson had made one of the best early heavy hardcore hits, *Adultery for Fun and Profit.* The money man for the production was Atlanta's Greek-American porno magnate Mike Thevis, who was seeking to launder some of his billions as federal authorities started closing in. Mike had started out as a newsstand owner, where he noticed that dirty books outsold regular magazines. He grew into one of the most successful sex industry moguls in American history, was imprisoned for murdering two of his competitors, escaped, then died of a heart attack after being recaptured.

*Poor Pretty Eddie* is probably best described as Genet's *The Balcony* as filtered through the warped narcissism of a third-rate Elvis impersonator. The film opens with Leslie Uggams pretty much playing herself, singing the national anthem at a football game. Like most of the film, this scene is cut-and-pasted through editing, down to the out-of-sync soundtrack. Deciding she wants to take a break from the entertainment business to see America, Leslie takes off in her Rolls and winds up breaking down somewhere in the backwoods, leaving her vulnerable to the gigolo Elvis, Eddie (Michael Christian), and a gaggle of resentful sex freaks.

It's a demented hillbilly stronghold. There's no telephone, of course, and God knows when the quiet mechanic will get the part for the Rolls. Shelley Winters

plays a fat, aged, decaying B-girl stripper who's keeping Eddie, who does shows for her at local bars and VFW halls. But Eddie sets his sights on the new dark meat in town, feeling she'll understand the compromise of his situation, of being kept for his art.

They all sit down for dinner. While Uggams is clad like a retarded third-grade girl, Eddie gets into his white polyesters and belts out a few songs, accompanied by a prerecorded tape. Uggams shrugs off his unseemly gyrations until she discovers him nestled in her cabin bed, nude and proffering a highball. Shocked, she tells him to get the hell out. He rapes her as the camera cuts lyrically to the outdoors, where two coon dogs put on a display of barnyard balling. Nearby, the hillbillies pass the jug and enjoy the spectacle, even inviting the younguns to see what nature's all about.

Knowing that Shelley just wants her out of the picture, Uggams begs for her help. Shelley slams her into the arms of a drunken, middle-age good ol' boy who makes her give him head in her car and rewards her with a belt beating. Like the dog sequence, the whipping scene is refracted in pornographic slow motion.

That's it for Leslie, who demands that Sheriff Slim Pickens arrest Eddie for rape, assault, and kidnapping. Slim listens to her impassioned plea as he absentmindedly doodles women's breasts on a pad. He asks, "Did he bite your titties?" Uggams is shocked, but accompanies Slim to the VFW hall where Eddie is playing. The whole gang winds up ripping her clothes off.

Despite her obvious hatred towards him, Eddie feels Uggams is such a good meal ticket he plans to force her to marry him. Brokenhearted Shelley Winters is in tears about her XXL wedding dress being given to a black woman. Crazy Eddie feeds the mechanic his own beloved coon dog and throws the dog's skin at Shelley, Leslie, and the mechanic at the dinner table. In the explosive conclusion, the mechanic shotguns Eddie into a bloody mess at the wedding, and Shelley weeps as she holds Eddie's polyester-clad corpse in her flabby arms.

*Black Vengeance* offers a flabbergasting star-studded spectacle, but 1977's *Fight for Your Life* outdoes it for sheer insanity—it's the racism exploitation movie to end them all. Calculated to drive inner city audiences berserk with rage for an hour and a half before giving whitey his comeuppance, it would also be suitable entertainment for a Ku Klux Klan barbecue.

The genesis of the film is another example of producer/distributor William

Mishkin's shoestring hucksterism. Mishkin had been retitling movies since first importing risqué foreign fare in the 1950s. After the premiere of *Fight for Your Life,* he invented a slew of other titles to suit different markets and trends: The movie was called *Staying Alive* during the disco era, *Bloodbath at 1313* for horror mavens, *Held Hostage* and *Getting Even* for the inner city audience, and *I Hate Your Guts* and *Fury Road* for the southern fried drive-in crowd.

*Fight for Your Life* was a typical bottom-drawer Mishkin financial venture, shot over a long weekend in upstate New York and costing $35,000 to produce. The film was directed by Robert Endelson, best known for his Mishkin-produced hit *The Filthiest Show in Town,* a hardcore comedy with porno-chic-era performers Harry Reems, Marc Stevens, and Alan Marlow. (Starting another Mishkin business practice, *Filthiest* had the dubious distinction of being the first triple-rated Mishkin film: There was a hard-X version for tenderloin areas and a soft-X and an R for other territories.) Bottom-of-the-barrel scriptwriter Straw Weisman was a Mishkin employee who performed such lowly functions as adding dialogue to hardcore inserts and writing the occasional one-reeler.



*Sleazoid Express* caught *Fight for Your Life* at the Empire (under the title *Held Hostage*) on a broiling hot evening in July 1980. The poster out front screamed "HELD HOSTAGE—By a Gang of Cutthroats!" A lobby card of an interracial rape promised, "There were tender moments, too," although *Sleazoid* never saw any.

The picture opens in Manhattan, where three vicious convicts—cracker hillbilly-deluxe Jesse Lee Cain (William Sanderson), a Puerto Rican named Chino, and an Asian called Ling Chow—are being transported to Sing Sing in a police van. They manage to bust out and steal a black pimp's car and clothes, leaving the player in his underwear on the street. The terrible trio head for the Canadian border, racking up a body count along the way.

Rampaging through the suburbs, the cons invade the house of a black deacon and his family. Deacon Turner is surprised by the sweaty and filthy Cain, who extends a hand and blurts out the unbelievable greeting, "Jesse Lee Cain—*pleased to meet ya, nigger!*" Against pictures of Martin Luther King and the Kennedys on the wall, with an occasional African mask for decor, Cain and company hold Turner and his family hostage.

Cain insists that he's the "massah" of the house now, and commands Mrs. Turner to "rustle him up some soul food." He chuckles to himself, demanding at gunpoint that Deacon Turner beg him, "Yessah, massah, us black-ass coons is all hungry." After asking if the Turner family has any objection to eating with "some friends of mine—a chink and a spic," Cain stuffs his face with food, eating with his hands and chewing with his mouth open. A food fight erupts between his comrades, and Cain blows up over their poor manners.

By now, the Empire audience was in utter disbelief. *Fight for Your Life* offers them a respite to laugh at Cain when he launches into a drunken soliloquy about his white-trash roots. He tearfully recalls a youthful prison rape: "You ought to know what I'm talking about, Pops; they cut you off between the legs. You know what it's like to be a boy, thrown in the hole, thrown to the animals . . ." The crowd cracked up.

Cain's monologue, however, is followed by one of the most racist scenes in exploitation history. Cain turns somber and demands some "down-home entertainment" from the Turners; he wants to see "a jig doing a jig." He demonstrates a spastic, knee-slapping, Stepin Fetchit shuffle and insists that Turner join in. "Now Pops is gonna do it for us solo." When the Deacon refuses, Cain shoots the floor, and as his family looks on in horror, Turner dances. Cain adds the coup de grace: "Trouble findin' appreciation even at home, huh Pops?"

One dehumanizing violation after another ensues. Ling Chow rapes a white girl who shows up to visit the family and then smashes in a little boy's head with a rock. Cain then forces himself on the Turners' daughter and proceeds to hang Mrs. Turner from a tree by a rope. When the Deacon cuts her down, Cain boasts that he "just filled his first black oak."

Throughout the film, a stoic, trenchcoat-clad detective nicknamed "Rulebook" Reilly pursues the cons. After cops have surrounded the house, Reilly bends the rules by tossing Deacon Turner a gun. Turner confronts Cain, calling him an impotent "white trash faggot" who's got "nothing to give."

"Who are you callin' a faggot, nigger?"

"You said as much yourself," the Deacon goads, knowing he's hit a raw nerve. "Young boy, going to prison for the first time, sure to be taken advantage of."

There were a few knowing snickers in the Empire auditorium's darkness.

When the pacifist Turner finally shoots Cain, the Empire crowd broke into cheers: "Fuckin' cracker deserved it!" White patrons tried to leave the theater as unassumingly as possible.

Constantly punctuated by wild outbursts of sex and violence, *Fight for Your Life* grabs the audience by the collar. Betraying his pornographer's roots, director Endelson follows the opening credits with a gratuitous mixed-combo sex scene before getting down to business. Ling Chow is portrayed as a sex maniac, chasing everyone from the Deacon's young son to the family pooch. Chino is the most asexual of the bunch, playing the stereotype of the yammering Puerto Rican coke fiend.

The whole freakish racist hallucination is distinguished by William Sanderson's idiosyncratic fireball performance as Cain, which inflamed the Empire audience into booing, hollering "cracker" and "honky," and flinging any handy object at his image on the screen. Even little kids with their parents joined in the act. *Sleazoid Express* never witnessed an audience so enraged and unified against what was going on on the screen.

Today, director Endelson is a dentist on Long Island. He's glad that the film is being appreciated again, but wishes he "hadn't made it so *direct.*" Scriptwriter Straw Weisman has spent his entire life twirling in the toilet bowl of exploitation showbiz, including writing dreck like *The First Turn-On* for Troma.

Like Fred Forrest, who starred in Andy Milligan's *The Filthy Five,* William Sanderson is a talented actor who made it out of the Mishkin milieu into Hollywood by pretending the film never happened. Sanderson was a law school grad turned actor, with a background that includes avant-garde off-Broadway theater, and later became familiar to mainstream audiences as J. F. Sebastian, the lonely humanoid repairman in *Blade Runner.* His forte, however, has always been hillbilly wild cards; witness his performance in the offbeat exploitation film *Savage Weekend.* Sanderson brought a toned-down version of this act to TV as part of the "Larry, Darryl and Darryl" team on the late-1980s comedy *Newhart,* and has since continued his hick run, down to appearing in the Turner Network George Wallace biopic. When he spoke to Mrs. Sleazoid in 1987, Sanderson feared that at any moment *Fight for Your Life* could rear its ugly head and hit him like a stink bomb from the past. Rightfully so, because he had a morals clause in his contract that he felt the film could violate.

Sanderson remembered working with the Mishkins: "William was a little more detached. Lewis was more intense and they argued with each other. That's kind of foreign to me when father and son bellow at each other. They knew how to make a movie, but this could have been the first non-X-rated one."

"Was it weird making the movie?" Sanderson mused. "Well, probably for the people around me. I don't think of this as weird. I just get a character and try to bend and immerse myself even more in the part. And by playing a racist, it scars you a little. I mean, you've got to be real careful. . . . I'd bring it home with me. You cannot play those characters exclusively without them taking a toll on you."

# SIX

# Blood Horror: Chopping 'Em Up at the Rialto

**"An idea based on blood and lust could spread quickly . . ."**

*—Blood Feast*

**Located right off the subway at the northwest corner of 7th Avenue and 42nd** Street, the Rialto bustled, its huge marquee looming over the gateway of the Deuce, drawing in the dating crowd and film lovers alike packed in elbow-to-elbow. One of the most popular grindhouses, it had the dynamics of a Broadway theater, with a large rectangular auditorium, good seats, a giant screen, and a fairly clean lobby. The Rialto tried hard in all of its incarnations to keep up its reputation as the four-star grindhouse of the Deuce, premiering cutting-edge exploitation films that went on to have marathon runs. Opinions flew throughout the dark like ghosts.

In 1963, director Herschell Gordon Lewis and producer David Friedman treated the Rialto to a shock experience that reduced the audience to a sea of white eyeballs. Entitled *Blood Feast,* the film premiered at the Rialto and stayed for a six-month run, then went on to shock audiences and influence film for decades. Friedman and Lewis had given birth to the American blood horror genre, pornographically minded meditations on psychopaths and societal rejects punctuated with gore-soaked reenactments of human slaughter. With their threatening predilections, these films were all the more spectacularly overbearing and convincing within the spacious confines of the Rialto, nestled inside America's most notorious red-light district.

Friedman and Lewis had earlier success as a team with early nudie-cutie films like *Living Venus* (1960) and *The Adventures of Lucky Pierre* (1961). At that time, any nude action in film was a legal risk. There were ten censorship boards in each distribution territory, so even a scene showing a nudist volleyball game was subject to the whims of local bluenoses. No legal precedents, however,

Mr. Sleazoid takes in a show at the Rialto, summer 1986. (Photo: Michelle Clifford)

forbade explicit violence. At the time, Hitchcock's *Psycho* had proved that a major studio could get away with graphic murder sequences. Yet Herschell felt that *Psycho* "cheated in the shower scene." It was time for a movie that would play its cards straight.

A graduate of Northwestern University, Herschell's background included stints as a University of Mississippi lit professor and a successful advertising copywriter. He'd been doing ads and making the occasional industrial film when he met exploitation impresario David Friedman, who at the time was taking over the legacy of Kroger Babb, one of the earliest exploitation producers/distributors. David was trying to make exploitation genre innovations of his own.

Friedman was of a harder school than Lewis, who jestingly refers to him as "an old carny guy, couldn't hurt a soul." Friedman was his own best exploitation creation. He was the son of a writer who worked for a conservative Alabama newspaper. Friedman's mother fled the family when he was a kid, so his permissive father moved them into a semi-residential hotel, which David prowled at all hours, peeking at card games, studying gambling, and measuring the habits of those who were addicted to the game. When this grew tiresome, he began to spend his time at a theater his uncle owned. He was bitten by the exploitation bug when early roadshow movies like *Sex Madness* and *Marijuana, the Devil's Weed* came to town.

David ran away from his father and the hotel several times to travel the carny circuit, where scamming fascinated him. He would watch as a shell-game shyster conned a farmer out of a season's hard-made earnings in a matter of minutes. After taking this all in, David went to work as a craps dealer in the infamously vice-infested Phenix City, Alabama, getting the job through friends of his father. After that gig burnt itself out, he worked briefly as a press agent for Paramount Pictures, which enabled him to meet and become a protégé of his idol, Kroger Babb.



Babb is best remembered for his crude sex-ed film *Mom and Dad,* which pivoted on baby birth footage and became a runaway hit from the 1940s through the 1950s. The film set a precedent by marketing exploitation to both sexes, scheduling separate screenings for men and women. As one of Babb's employees at that time, Friedman would appear at *Mom and Dad* screenings outfitted in a doctor's coat and pretending to be "Elliot Forbes," a sex-ed instructor, selling movie tie-in books that would actually bring in more cash than they made from ticket sales. People would buy up the books as souvenirs of their outrageous and scandalous experience. Maybe they'd also show it to their friends, or enjoy it privately as a stimulant to the libido.

Friedman eventually became Babb's successor in a company called Entertainment Ventures, where he released early Mondo movies, produced some of the first nudist-camp pictures, and enabled Herschell Lewis's innovation of the blood horror genre as supervising producer and impresario. Friedman became a major producer of softcore sexploitation, which used a lot of gesture, dry humping, and tease as a proxy for the sexual act. Their women ranged from mature bust models

to trashy Hollywood Boulevard starlets, and the men they were paired with could be swarthy lotharios, overage jocks, or dirty old men. Friedman had a special genius for conceiving the storylines, titles, and ad campaigns for these softcore movies; it's where his creativity was fully unleashed. His productions from the late 1960s—like *Thar She Blows!* (1969), *Starlet* (1969), and *Trader Hornee* (1970)—tweaked Hollywood myths and referred to old stags simultaneously, while giving the audience some nudity and simulated sex.

After the advent of hardcore, the softcore movies Friedman had profited from became obsolete. Although it disgusted him to become a pornographer after having been a leading exploitation impresario, Friedman went where the money was and stayed with the times. He turned to hardcore, and even rose to be head of the Adult Filmmakers Association of America.

Friedman has entertained exploitation aficionados for decades and lined his pockets handsomely through ticket sales, yet he maintains a staunchly misanthropic attitude, describing his films as a shell game and his audience as a bunch of suckers to be had. All films are shit, he'll say, but adds that his films are the best shit.

But you have to hand it to him: The man had a remarkable way with lurid ad campaigns and posters. His simple red-on-black line-drawn poster for *Blood Feast* is a brilliant encapsulation of the film's mix of sex and violence.

Lewis recalled that when you opened a movie on the Deuce, "you had to pay a theater a $500 fee to put up a lobby display." The display, of course, was designed to draw an audience by showing the most lurid and shocking material. Lewis remembers that when the Rialto started to draw crowds, and curious ticket buyers flocked down the Deuce to find out what the excitement was about, the management "raised the admission from $1.50 to $2.50."

Before it opened in 1963, nothing remotely like *Blood Feast* had existed. Its credits unfold over a picture of the Sphinx—in reality, a statue that stood outside the Suez Motel in Miami Beach. The film opens with a bleach-blonde relaxing in her bathtub. Lewis's adman voice on a tinny old radio warns of a murderer on the loose. In a scene with a heavy sexual undertone, Ramses (Mal Arnold) breaks in and hacks off her leg. Ramses has dark hair painted silverish blue, and huge eyebrows: He's almost a satirical doppelganger of filmmaker Lewis, mixed with the similarly swarthy Richard Speck. In fact, almost every guy in the movie is the same

type, which is part of its charm. The only exception is the cop protagonist played by Thomas Wood (aka William Kerwin), a veteran of Friedman's nudies. Sporting a flattop, Wood seems like an old-fashioned black-soxer who dropped out of an Elks Club stag movie.

Ramses worships a statue of the Egyptian goddess Ishtar that he keeps on an altar in the back of his catering shop. (It's clearly a department store mannequin spray-painted gold.) When a suburban woman comes in to arrange a dinner party for her daughter, Ramses leers across the counter. "Have you ever had *an Egyptian feast?*" he queries, as if it's a password for perverse sex play.

Meanwhile, police are in hot pursuit of the leg-chopping maniac. The cops carry the verbal exposition in the same manner that later Warhol films like *Vinyl* and *The Life of Juanita Castro* used Ronald Tavel's screenplays: Lewis's stalwart actors read directly off their scripts into the camera. Similarly, the scenes are very basically shot: far shot, close-up. Nevertheless, these static scenes uniquely capture the stagnant heat of Florida, where the film was made.



Gruesome scene 2: A couple make out on the beach. After the guy finally talks the girl into sex, Ramses swoops down on them and ends the fun by decapitating the girl with a meat cleaver. The boyfriend runs away and leaves Ramses to masturbate into the entrails. Later, a flashing red light indicates the police have arrived. The cop and his partner comfort the guy, who is so fakely hysterical it's hilarious.

Ramses pursues his next victim, a drunken blonde with a beehive and a wet shirt. She sneaks off to a hotel room with her good-time-Charlie boyfriend, who wears a captain's cap. As Lewis's appropriately wobbly music drones on in the background, Captain Hat leaves to get some more tipple. Eventually the coast is clear and Ramses lurches into his limping prowl. When the blonde answers the knock on her door, Ramses charges in, pins her down, then shoves his fingers down her throat and rips her tongue out of her bloody mouth.

The chief cop on the Ramses case has eyes for a future intended victim, played by former *Playboy* centerfold Connie Mason, whose hip mother has hired Ramses to cater the Egyptian feast. Ever the romantic, the cop takes Connie on a date to a lecture on Egyptology. A flashback sequence illustrates the lecturer's words. Another Ramses type, clad in a high-school-play version of an ancient Egyptian costume, rips out a woman's heart. Her corpse lies on a slab, draped in

an open vest that very deliberately covers each breast. Her eyes stare out vacantly under loud makeup in an eroticized snuff tableau.

In addition to catering feasts, it turns out that Ramses also publishes obscure Egyptology pamphlets. He receives a letter from a girl inquiring about one of his publications, which prompts him to do some onanistic worship of his Ishtar idol. Cut to a group of girls in bikinis sitting by a pool, listening to music. Ramses limps onto the scene from out of nowhere, and knocks down his stern-looking new brunette pen pal.

Suddenly, she's chained to the wall of Ramses' lair. He whips her bloody with a cat-o'nine-tails made of clothesline as he bellows, "GIVE YOURSELF UP TO THE GODDESS!" Ramses throws a human leg from his freezer into a pizza oven. The police get the word to go to Ramses' catering shop, where the corpse of the woman is discovered, covered head to toe with red welts. They know they've got their mad butcher, and speed over to Connie's house, where Ramses is throwing his Egyptian feast. They're just in time: Ramses has hypnotized Connie into lying on a kitchen counter in preparation for his next sex killing.

After the cops break up the psychodrama, Ramses limps away towards the beach, tossing a machete on the way. He attempts to hide in a garbage truck, where he is squashed to death. The film concludes by reprising its opening image of the Sphinx, upon which drops of blood are falling.

*Blood Feast* is a model of how a sly low-budget film can thoroughly deliver the goods to the audience. Highly entertaining, it's permeated throughout by Lewis's sadistic sense of humor, which laughs along with the audience instead of at it. While very much a guy movie, you could still take a date to *Blood Feast* and offer *comfort* during it. "I daresay," Lewis adds with a dash of deserved Satanic pride, "that *Blood Feast* still beats *The Blair Witch Project.*"

*Blood Feast* is American Grand Guignol, with Lewis as the Sadean master of ceremonies. Aside from its pure shock value, it's remarkable for its $1.98 surrealism. The colors look like garishly repainted Florida postcards, and its murder scenes are dreamlike, compounding the extreme sense of unreality. To save money, Lewis even did the musical score himself (under the pseudonym Sheldon Seymour) and proves to have quite a talent for it, achieving a transcendent Brian Eno simplicity.

The French were among the first to openly embrace Lewis's importance as a

filmmaker, but he's always been a huge influence at home in the States. The image of Ramses, with his blue hair and eye makeup, dripped down to influence John Waters, especially in his direction of actor David Lochary in *Pink Flamingos.* As a child, Waters would feed his head trips by sitting on a hill near his local Baltimore drive-in, watching Lewis's films through his binoculars. Herschell aptly chuckled over the worship—"If John did that, he's a bigger masochist than I thought!"—but he loved Waters's homage nonetheless.

The two other movies in Lewis and Friedman's "Gore Trilogy" hit the Deuce with a splash as well. The redneck nightmare *2,000 Maniacs* (1964) boldly shows women hacked to pieces in gang-bang-style situations and a girl's finger chopped off after a sexual overture. *Color Me Blood Red* (1965) focuses on an obnoxious painter who uses human blood for that special shade of red.

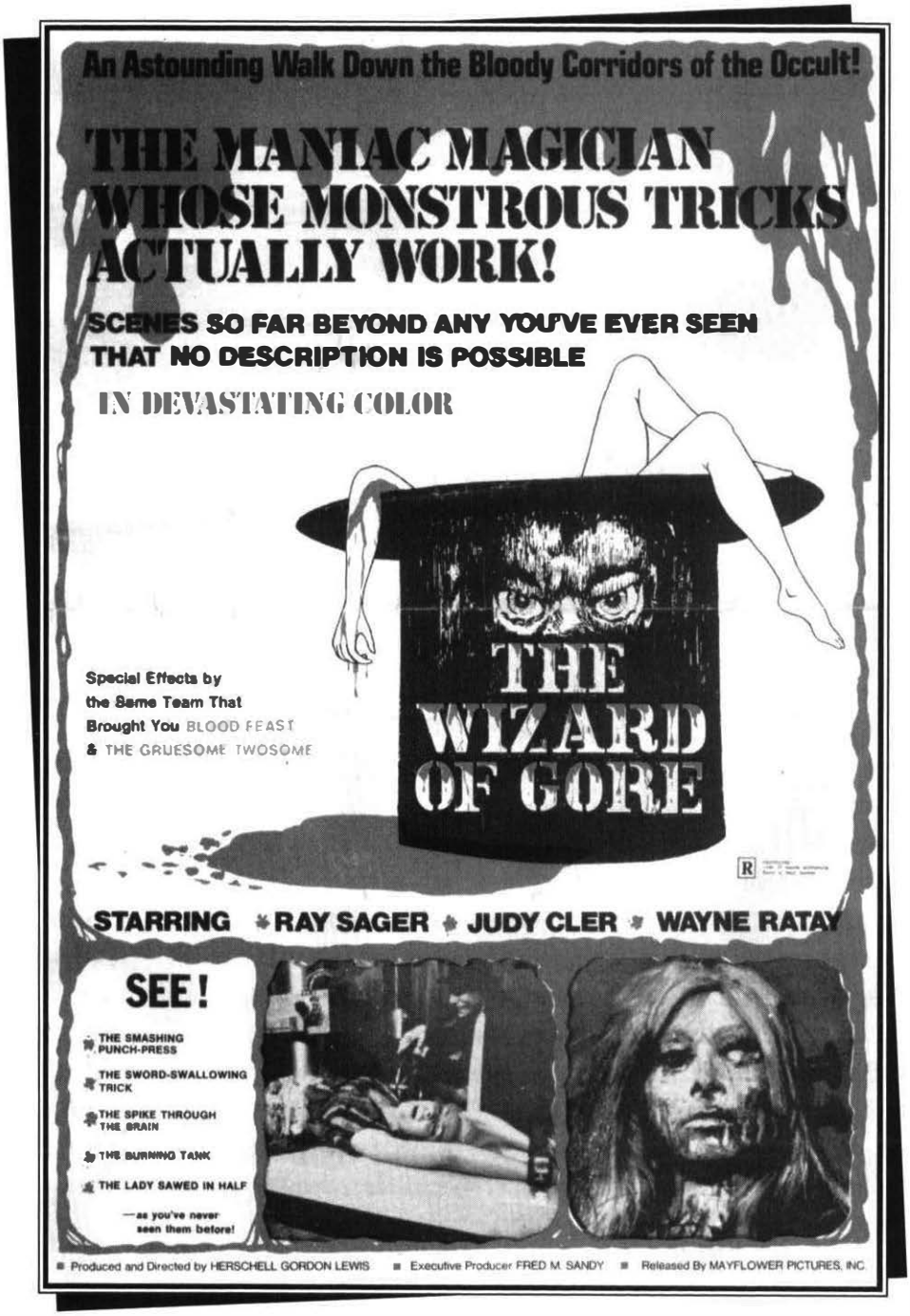
The blood horror movies Lewis made after his split from producer Friedman appeared on 42nd Street during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Too heavy and extreme for suburban theaters, they were just touched-in-the-head enough for the gritty Deuce. *The Gruesome Twosome* (1967) focused on a mother and her idiot son scalping women so they can sell wigs made from real human hair. The film opens with a curious sequence of two wig stands speaking to each other, which then veers into a stomach-churning scalping. *The Wizard of Gore* (1970) featured Montag the Magician dismembering and disemboweling women in onstage bondage contraptions. Both films are so intense and nausea-inducing that for years Lewis's supporters and detractors both suspected him of "spiking" them by sticking in subliminal shock/gore shots. Beginning with the legendary drive-in concession ad that flashed split-second messages like "Buy a hot dog!," subliminals were a commonly used—or at least commonly suspected—advertising technique at the time these films were made. Ex–ad man Lewis never confirmed or denied this rumor, which only adds to his films' mystique.

Inevitably, the Lewis imitators followed. *The Undertaker and His Pals* (1967) was influenced by Lewis's sense of gallows humor, taking a hokey approach to cannibalism while delivering many explicitly violent scenes. A clutch of creepy losers runs a diner that serves parts of young females for its blue-plate specials. When a girl named Lamb is hacked up, the night's offering is "Leg of Lamb." Though its relentlessly cornball morbid humor grows slow, the film still delivers a high level of shocking violence, considering when it was made.

Ramses' twisted handiwork in *Blood Feast*. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection, courtesy Something Wierd Video and Shock Films)

*Undertaker* was a Deuce staple for many years and in 1972 was packaged on a triple bill called *The Three Dimensions of Shock*. *Shock's* memorable, roadshow-influenced ad campaign promised a life insurance policy if you died of fright during the screening. The triple bill managed to shoot beyond 42nd Street into outer boroughs like Brooklyn. The two supporting features were *The Embalmer* (1966; 1972 Deuce opening), a black-and-white Italian import, and *The Corpse Grinders* (1972), one of the Deuce's funniest and most beloved horror movies directed by Ted V. Mikels, one of the most eccentric of the horror directors. An open polygamist, he lives in Vegas with a group of women and lots of kids, and refers to his wives as "castle ladies."

*The Corpse Grinders* is a wonder of tackiness and concision. Maltby (real life cat-fancier J. Byron Foster, playing a character who resembles one of those old baggy-pants vaudevillians) and his sinister partner Landau (Dustin Hoffman's cousin, Sanford Mitchell) operate a cat food company that grinds human corpses into its product. The tinfoil grinder contraption is one of exploitation's cheapest,


An Astounding Walk Down the Bloody Corridors of the Occult!
THE MANIAC MAGICIAN WHOSE MONSTROUS TRICKS ACTUALLY WORK!
SCENES SO FAR BEYOND ANY YOU'VE EVER SEEN THAT NO DESCRIPTION IS POSSIBLE
IN DEVASTATING COLOR
Special Effects by the Same Team That Brought You BLOOD FEAST & THE GRUESOME TWOSOME
THE WIZARD OF GORE
R
STARRING * RAY SAGER * JUDY CLER * WAYNE RATAY
SEE!
THE SMASHING PUNCH-PRESS
THE SWORD-SWALLOWING TRICK
THE SPIKE THROUGH THE BRAIN
THE BURNING TANK
THE LADY SAWED IN HALF
—as you've never seen them before!
Produced and Directed by HERSCHELL GORDON LEWIS
Executive Producer FRED M. SANDY
Released By MAYFLOWER PICTURES, INC.

Herschell Gordon Lewis's classic shocker *The Wizard of Gore*; self-rated R with no MPAA seal. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection, courtesy Something Weird Video and Shock Films)

funniest Rube Goldberg inventions: a body drops in and hamburger meat churns out. A suspicious doctor (exploitation stalwart Sean Kenney) and his secretary check out the cat food company after the secretary's fuzzy feline gets unnaturally attackful.

*The Corpse Grinders* throws the audience from flash-forwards to flashbacks, and is populated by spectacularly exaggerated Hollywood Boulevard actors emoting hilarious bits of exploitation-rich dialogue. Maltby lusts after the bikini-clad corpse of a girl before she's to be ground up and mopes, "But she's . . . so young." "Maltby, she's a corpse!" says Landau. When Maltby asks Landau for some "walking around money," he demonstrates the banking method of exploitation filmmaking by taking it out of a cigar box. Caleb, a creepy gravedigger who supplies the bodies, keeps insisting on raising the price and complains "I want everything that's coming to me." "Oh, you're going to get everything that's coming to you, Caleb," Landau says coolly, as we're treated to a flash-forward of the grinder in action.

Little more than an hour long, *The Corpse Grinders* is a miracle of concision, and its garish colors and tawdry, precise sense of composition help make it a standout in the genre. Its thoroughly skewed sensibility endeared it to Deuce audiences, who enjoyed seeing it again and again.

While Ted Mikels was establishing himself as the West Coast blood horror powerhouse, the East Coast company Cinemation Industries was becoming a major force in exploitation movies and would soon leave its distinct imprint on the blood horror genre. Cinemation was founded in 1968 by Queens, New York, movie mavens Jerry Gross and Nick Demetroules, best pals who'd attend each new film on 42nd Street and study it for its title oomph, ad campaign, and shock value. The pair had began humbly with *Girl on a Chain Gang* (1965), which Nick and Jerry shot in black and white over two weeks on Long Island and which showed only five seconds of a girl on a chain gang. They followed this up with *Teenage Mother* (1966), which featured baby-birthing footage that Jerry had bought from a hospital for $50 and tacked on to the ending. Both films starred Jerry's wife, Arlene Sue Farber, who later had a brief Hollywood appearance in *The French Connection.*

Jerry and Nick were openly influenced by Mike Ripps, the exploitation impresario who turned the black-and-white 1957 flop called *Bayou* into the decade-long hit *Poor White Trash* by using a classic teaser campaign and adding folksy

THE FINAL DIMENSION IN SHOCK!
...LIKE SPENDING A NIGHT IN THE GRAVE!
PUBLIC NOTICE:
Due to the highly intense and macabre nature of this program, the producer insists on a personally signed Certificate Of Assurance ...assuring the sound mind and body of everyone!
1
Witness Bone-Crushing Terror In...
the CORPSE GRINDERS
Turns Bones and Flesh of Young Lovelies Into A Screaming, Macabre Total Death!
A Ted V. Mikels Film Production
IN COLOR
2
Sinister And Terrifying!
IN COLOR
THE UNDERTAKER AND HIS PALS
3
Fiendish And Petrifying!
THE EMBALMER
A DEMENTED SOUL!
Released by GENERAL FILM DISTRIBUTING CO.
IMPORTANT! Arrangements have been made for a nurse to provide free blood pressure checks to anyone on request.

A package of three terrific short horror movies with the ultimate capper of an insurance policy if you died of fright. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)

surreal sexual tableaux that made the audience *think* it was seeing more than it was.

Jerry and Nick had no idea how to contact Mike, so they scooped him through a ruse, announcing in *Variety* that they were making a film called *Poor White Trash* (which, in reality, was *Girl on a Chain Gang*). When Ripps sent them a cease-and-desist letter, they revealed themselves as new kids in the business who were in search of a mentor, and subsequently struck up an amicable association. Every time Ripps would pass through New York, he'd meet with Jerry and Nick in a hotel room and, in exchange for $100 and a pot of room service coffee, would would give them various tips about marketing films. They thought Mike was exploitation's smoothest operator, from how he titled his movies to what he actually delivered to the audience. He'd always end the sessions by promising to tell Nick and Jerry "the ultimate secret" of selling exploitation films, but never did.

Nevertheless, Jerry Gross was convinced that the key to success was a good title and ad campaign attached to a movie which itself delivered at least some of its promises. Jerry became so ambitious he took over a floor of the MGM building near Rockefeller Center in Manhattan. Then the problems began. Nick couldn't take Jerry's intensity: "He'd sit in his office drinking a bottle of vodka a day on the phone to different subdistributors and producers." Nick interpreted Jerry's behavior as overreaching, so Nick cashed out his Cinemation stock and formed his own company, NMD Film Distributing. Eventually Nick closed NMD Films after selling their video rights and became a car salesman.

Jerry, however, took Cinemation on a heavy roll for many years. Some of its big hits included the classic Melvin Van Peebles black film *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971; see chapter 13), a French import with the menacing title *From Ear to Ear* (1971), the "X-rated and animated" *Fritz the Cat* (1972), and the classic blood horror movie *I Drink Your Blood* (1970).

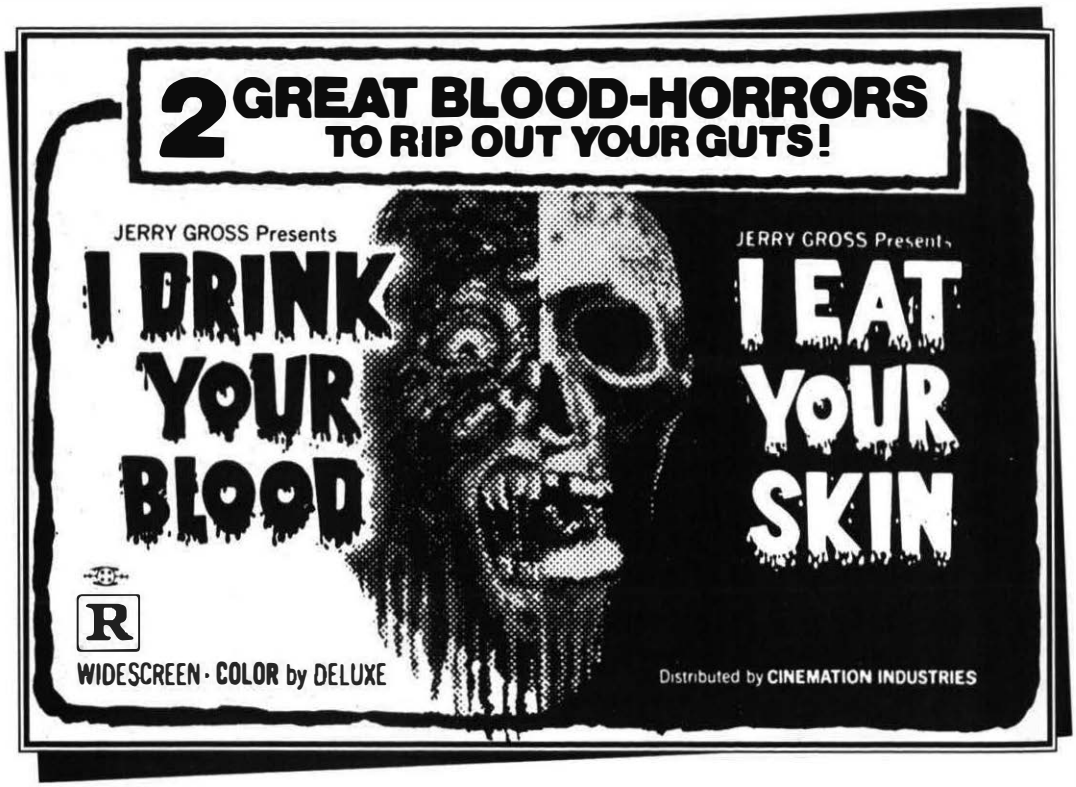
Jerry was one of the first exploitation magnates to mouth back to the MPAA and speak out about it in the press. After the agency awarded *I Drink Your Blood* one of the first X ratings based on graphic violence rather than sex, Jerry agreed to cut the film to get an R, but then released the X-rated version anyway. When the MPAA discovered the trick and threatened to withdraw the R rating and impose a fine, Jerry had the prints hacked at quickly and individually, with some territories leaving in more footage than others. This was a common technique among gutsier

exploitation companies, and led to some viewers recalling scenes that others didn't see, the conflicting verbal retellings giving the movies a folkloric status that only fed their legends and led film fanatics to seek them out even more doggedly.

Jerry packaged *I Drink Your Blood* on a double header with an old black-and-white horror called *I Eat Your Skin,* underscoring the iconographic titles and ghoulish ad artwork with the tagline "2 GREAT BLOOD-HORRORS TO RIP OUT YOUR GUTS." This ad campaign was so strikingly effective that the double bill roared across the country through 1971, and persisted in various Deuce grindhouses for a good six months.

*I Drink Your Blood* proved to be such a crowd pleaser that it continued play-






Jerry Gross's ad made this horror double-header a long-playing multimillion-dollar success. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection, courtesy Something Weird Video and Harry Novak)

ing well until after Cinemation Industries had folded and Jerry had moved on to other controversial exploitation films like *I Spit on Your Grave. Sleazoid* originally caught *I Drink Your Blood* in its "hard" 77-minute version (the uncut director's print is 86 minutes) at 42nd Street's Times Square Theater back in 1979. When it played the Deuce on a double header with Ruggero Deodato's cannibal classic *Carnivorous* (see Chapter 8), the impact was like a brick to the head. Audience members were stunned into silence and there was even the occasional sound and odor of vomiting in the dark.

*I Drink Your Blood* is a post-Manson variant on *Night of the Living Dead,* with a satanic hippie cult as the centrifugal force for the bloodshed. The cult is led by Horace Bones, played by an odd duck named Bhaskar, a muscular, effete, long-haired East Indian. His followers are a motley collection of societal outcasts and sexual messes: There's a black street queen who seems like he dropped out of an all-male 42nd Street theater; a mute (played by an unbilled Lynn Lowry of *Score* and *Sugar Cookies*); a bewigged, very pregnant woman; a freak-era skank; a prunefaced Oriental lady in a Chinatown cocktail dress; and various sex-hungry young men.

These hippie creeps convene on a small Massachusetts town, where they take over an abandoned house. An old man tries to shoo them away, but they laugh at him and feed him LSD. As retribution, the geezer's grandson slips them meat pies that contain the blood of a rabid dog. The rabies poison interacts with the LSD coursing through their systems, transforming the freaks into violent, rabid lunatics, setting them off on a barrage of violent mayhem.

After the cult stabs one of its own members to death and amputates his leg, another member flees and hitchhikes away. She gets picked up, however, by a bunch of hardhats who make her the centerpiece of a blue-collar gang-bang. For our edification, a doctor who seems left over from a 1930s VD-warning movie like *Sex Madness* describes the symptoms of rabies: delirium, insane violence, fear of water, and inevitable death. The gang-bang with the infected cult member passes along rabies to the hardhats and turns them into a bunch of marauding ghouls, too.

Meanwhile, back at cult headquarters, the other followers run amok. Lynn Lowry slices an old lady's hand off with an electric carving knife. When the pregnant woman learns she is going to die from rabies, she rips off her wig and stabs

herself in the stomach while crying about wanting to have a baby. The Chinese lady immolates herself in the middle of the town in the manner of Buddhist monks protesting the carnage in Vietnam.

*I Drink Your Blood* is the pinnacle of the blood horror movie. It's fast, unrelentingly violent, and sexually explicit, dishing out a new shock every few minutes. The casting is inspired, particularly Bhaskar as the Mansonoid figure. In real life a Boston dance instructor, Bhaskar has a mincing, perverted aggressiveness, accentuated by his East Indian cadences. The film's psychedelic synthesizer music is another genre innovation.

Director David Durston brings a tight professionalism to the execution that places it above other blood horror films. What is most remarkable about his direction is its approach to the genre's terminal sex underpinnings, displaying Durston's distinctive brand of sexual phobia as filtered through a skewed gay sensibility—a remarkably subversive achievement in a film that played to a huge straight audience. This sensibility is evident throughout many of the film's strongest scenes: the first victim sticking his hand under his pants and semiconsciously rubbing his cock just before he's murdered, the creepy medical voice-over, and the ample male nudity during the rabies-transmitting gang-bang.





Curiously (or maybe not so curiously), many of the key directors who made innovations in the blood horror genre had gotten their start in sexploitation or hardcore pornographic filmmaking. It's been something most of these directors haven't completely attempted to hide yet don't bring up. Contrary to the cliché that porn ruins a straight career, in fact it's never kept those behind the camera from working in other genres. Durston, in particular, always had a hand in the specialized and insular netherworld of gay hardcore porn. Under the pseudonym David Ransom, Durston made the notorious gay hardcore films *Boy-Napped* (1975), with Jamie Gillis and Wade Nichols, and *Manhold* (1976) in 3-D with Gillis, Nichols, and roughie auteur Zebedy Colt. Drawing the same vivid connection between sex and violence that distinguishes *I Drink Your Blood, Boy-Napped* attempted to mix heavy gay S&M with a straightforward exploitation melodrama. One scene called for Gillis to run through the streets of Little Italy carrying a gun. Startled neighbors phoned the police. Durston took the rap and ended up spending the night in jail. And in a strange *Hollywood Babylon* twist, *Manhold* was never released because it starred an actor who got a gig in the Clint Eastwood film

*Escape from Alcatraz*. In the film world, it's not uncommon for sex movies to be "purchased back" by representatives of actors who have gone on to bigger things, but it never works. The rumor or an actual print of the film always leaks out.

As with *I Drink Your Blood*, sexual phobia and death remained the leitmotif of Durston's later R-rated work, such as the offbeat, sexploitational *Blue Sextet* (1971) and the venereal disease mystery melodrama *Stigma* (1972) with a young Philip Michael Thomas.

Around the same time that *I Drink Your Blood* was first making the rounds, the notorious blood horror movie *The Headless Eyes* (1971) also fell victim to an X rating for violence, but still managed to become a box office success. The film emanated from a sex industry collective: It was produced by veteran pornographer Ron Sullivan (aka the prolific "Henri Pachard") and was directed by Kent Bateman, the father of TV brats Justine and Jason. Justine once described her father as being in the "erotic art movie" business.

*The Headless Eyes* brought *Blood Feast*'s sex criminal antagonist prototype into the 1970s, making him a believably isolated loner who wouldn't look out of place on the corner of 42nd Street and Broadway, where the Rialto stood. The film opens with the antagonist (Bo Brundin, wearing a twenty-dollar 8th Avenue woman's wig as a disguise) breaking into a junkie's apartment just after she's shot up. Lying on the bed in a negligee, she's jarred out of her nod to find Bo rifling through her purse. "Don't scream!" he implores, covering her mouth in a rapist/murderer's gesture. "I just want $65 for my lousy rent!" She grabs a handy burnt spoon lying by the bed and gouges out his eye. Bo screams "My eye! My eye!" as bystanders on the street surround him in a myopic POV shot. The screen goes red.

Now sporting an eye patch, the balding, paunchy Bo stews in his wreck of an art studio. Since his loss, he's been stuck on a theme: He's surrounded by sculptures containing the eyes of his murder victims, and eyeballs hang by strings over his bed. As with those who vent their sexual frustrations by collecting serial-killer books or race-hate literature, the material's proximity continually feeds the illness, keeping the misanthropy fresh. One senses that he'd be better off if he got rid of the eyeballs.

A drunken old couple pass Bo's window and the eyeball sculptures catch their notice, so Bo sneaks out and stalks them back to their house. As the couple argues, the wife willingly lets Bo in, and he stabs both the old farts to death. Walking

down the street with a bloody shirt, Bo is picked up by a foolish streetwalker, whom he kills in a hotel room to top off his evening of insanity.

Bo slaughters yet another woman, then turns up in the background of the nightly news report on her slaying. A Times Square joke shop newspaper's headline screams "FOURTEENTH EYEBALL MURDER." Bo goes on to stalk a sleazy blonde porn starlet; in a believable Manhattan touch, he spies on her from her fire escape. Eventually, she gets in a cab to make a drug delivery. When she sees him following, she knows he's a nut out to get her—he looks too obviously unhinged to be a cop.

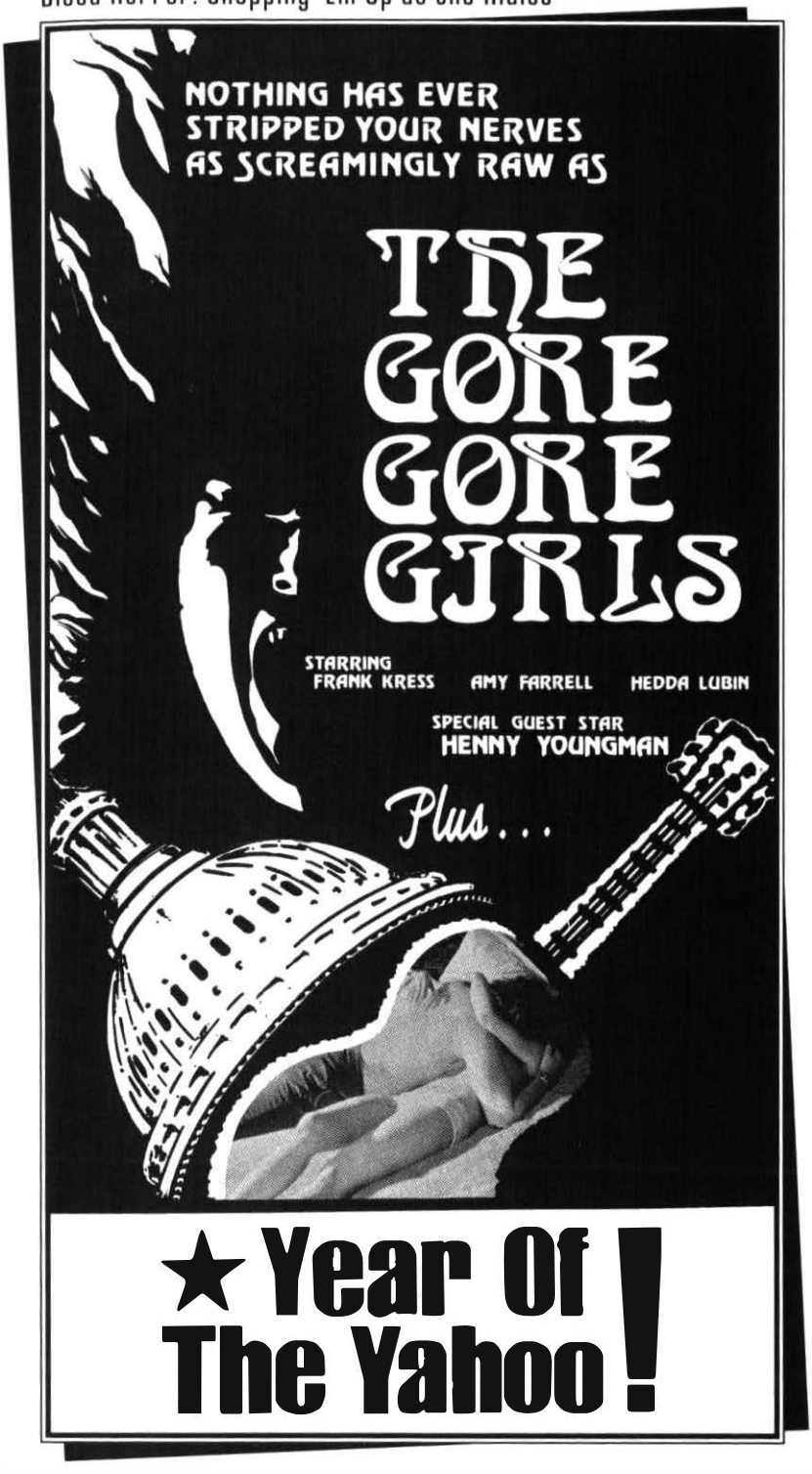
Bo chases her through Manhattan's deserted meatpacking district, playing a sadistic game of hide-and-seek in a meat freezer as she tries to hide behind hung carcasses. Spying a set of available butcher knives, Bo snatches one and stabs her, being sure to pluck out her eyes. Then dead cow eyes are all staring at him. His own insanity finally paralyzes him. The next morning, Bo's frozen corpse falls out the door as the meatpacking workers open up.



With murder scenes choreographed like slow-moving sex assaults, *The Headless Eyes* is true to the psychosexual underpinnings of blood horror. Made long before the obsession with technical special effects in horror movies, it's a film that nonetheless gives you The Fear. The film works best when it's silent in its minimalist, no-budget way, and it takes full advantage of claustrophobic New York City locations, which are deserted during winter—its Manhattan doesn't look like the metropolis of 1971, let alone the megalopolis of today. Sullivan's background in pornography allowed him to select a believably sleazy female supporting cast, and Bo Brundin is effective in portraying the shlubby stalker antagonist, long before that type became legion. Ultimately, *The Headless Eyes* earns its place in the exploitation pantheon because it's as isolated, weird, and discordant as its main character.

Ron Sullivan recalls his work on the film as "making a living. Payday. One of hundreds of films I've worked on as production manager, doing the budget, producing, directing. My role in *Headless Eyes* was line producer, making sure everybody got it together. The movie only took four or five days to shoot."

With these new entries to the blood horror genre upping the ante in sheer gruesomeness, it was time for the original master to return. In 1972, after making a few softcore movies like *Miss Nymphet's Zap-In,* Herschell Gordon Lewis directed his blood horror swan song, *The Gore Gore Girls.* As with the other ultra-




Herschell Gordon Lewis's roughest, cheapest, and last horror movie, with no rating posted (it was an official "X"); the second feature is Lewis's obscure redneck sexploitational political satire. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection, courtesy Something Weird Video and Shock Films)

low-budget blood horrors, the MPAA awarded Lewis's film an X rating for violence. Down-at-the-heels comic Henny Youngman plays a strip club owner whose employees keep getting knocked off in grotesque ways. What is remarkable is not the joke-store special effects but the disgusting manner in which the victims are murdered: One woman has her face shoved in boiling oil (as Lewis happily chirps, "We french fried her"); another has her nipples snipped off—one breast sprouts chocolate milk. Despite MPAA disapproval, the film had a healthy run, sometimes turning up as a second feature under the title *Blood Orgy.* With *The Gore Gore Girls,* Lewis felt that the gore film had exhausted its market, but was later surprised to discover that his assumption was wrong.

Indeed, 1972 was the year when exploitation did what it wanted, despite attempted MPAA constraints. Hallmark, a small Massachusetts company with extremely lucrative distribution through American International Pictures, gave the MPAA the finger and shifted from the skinflick market into straightforward sex-driven horror. The first sign that Hallmark was changing direction was *The Case of the Full Moon Murders* (1972), which starred porn stalwarts Harry Reems, Fred Lincoln, and Jean Jennings. Released on the adult circuit, it set the stage for Hallmark's bloody witch-hunter import, *Mark of the Devil* (1970; Deuce opening 1972). Hallmark used roadshow tactics to avoid getting an X rating for the film, instead rating it "V for violence" and using the gimmick of giving out a free vomit bag with each admission. The ad campaign centered on a woman in a scold's bridle about to have her tongue pierced. Like *Together,* a Hallmark sex-instruction movie directed by Sean Cunningham, *Mark* took advantage of the huge network of exhibitors American International Pictures had developed since the days when Roger Corman had been directing monster cheapies in the 1950s. Thus, the film could play a larger number of venues than unrated movies usually were able to.

After these violent sexual successes, Hallmark produced *Last House on the Left* (1972), which set the new standard in onscreen brutality. *Last House* was armed with a now classic menacing ad campaign warning you to "keep repeating 'it's only a movie . . . it's only a movie.' " Shot under the working title *Krug's People* and once previewed as *Sex Crime of the Century,* the film was originally planned to be hardcore, but instead cut straight to the terminal sadism jugular. *Last House* used Hallmark's seasoned pornography crew, producer Sean Cunningham, and director Wes Craven. Years before directing Meryl Streep as a music

CAN A MOVIE GO TOO FAR?
MARI, SEVENTEEN, IS DYING. EVEN FOR HER THE WORST IS YET TO COME!
TO AVOID FAINTING KEEP REPEATING, IT'S ONLY A MOVIE ..ONLY A MOVIE ..ONLY A MOVIE ..ONLY A MOVIE ..ONLY A MOVIE ..ONLY A MOVIE
...IT'S JUST ACROSS THE STREET FROM "JOE"!
LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT
WARNING! NOT RECOMMENDED FOR PERSONS OVER 30!

*Last House*'s classic, much-imitated ad—note the three menacing thugs and the ad copy placing it in the freak era by comparing it to *Joe*. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)

teacher, Craven appeared as the peekaboo photographer snapping the nude twins Brooke and Taylor Young in Howard Ziehm's X-rated *Hot Cookies*. Under a pseudonym, he also directed the hardcore shocker *Fireworks Woman*, a bizarre sado-masochistic film about a priest in love with his sister.

*Last House* is a meditation on Ingmar Bergman's *The Virgin Spring* played

out as an exercise in terminal sadism involving four lowdown jail-jumping perverts. And they're perfectly cast. David Hess, as lead villain Krug, is relaxed and practiced in his sexual thuggery. Like the evil piece of shit he is, Krug gets his teenage son hooked on heroin so the boy will more easily follow his criminally insane orders. Fred Lincoln, who plays "Weasel the child molester," was already a known quantity to Deuce audiences as an NYC porno actor. As the female arm of this foul bunch, the hard-bitten Jeramie Rain is just as hateful and merciless as her male cohorts. Rain was at the time recognizable to audiences from her bare-assed white trash performances in *The Abductors* and *Preacherman* (see chapter 10).

These four characters are a symbiotic sexual, sadistic, chaotic mess who cross unfortunate paths with two suburban girls. Trying to buy a measly dime bag of weed for a rock concert, the girls make the mistake of asking the innocuous-looking son, who's all too happy to deliver them to his dad's crew for brownie points. The girls are shoved into the trunk of the twisted bunch's car, to the accompaniment of distastefully cutesy comic-relief music.



Unbeknownst to the criminals, they've pulled up in the suburban area that's just across the street from one of the girls' parents. The debasement opens with Krug making one of the girls piss her pants. What ensues is a hideous protracted rape-murder of the two girls, one of whom is a virgin. The other, who is more sexually experienced, fights back against the perverts and suffers bitterly for it.



The virgin kidnap victim's father happens to be a doctor who treats methadone addicts, and before she's killed the girl desperately tries to appeal to Krug's son, who's having severe dope withdrawal. Krug uses a switchblade to carve his name on her stomach to make his point to his son, in a scene that is shown in some versions only in flashback.

In a nod to *The Virgin Spring,* the creeps finally seek refuge in the virgin victim's very own home, without knowing it. The leitmotif of Craven's best films, like *The Hills Have Eyes,* is set up: the clash of two opposing post-nuclear "families." The murdered victim's own mother and father exact their own brutal, final revenge. Weasel is seduced into a blowjob by the mother, who bites his cock off and lets him bleed to death. In the operatically bloody climax, Krug bullies his own son into suicide by demanding the kid blow his brains out. The murdered girl's father brutally chainsaws Krug to death.

Predictably, the MPAA awarded the film an X when Hallmark submitted it for review, but the company slapped a faux R-rating on it anyway and performed makeshift snips after the fact, with some versions popping up that were more severe than others.

*Last House* got a chilly reception from the mainstream critics: The *New York Daily News* gave it zero stars, and *The New York Times* critic didn't even get that far, walking out after twenty minutes. However, it proved to be one of the Deuce's biggest hits, playing on and off for a decade. The ad campaign and title became a re-used and often-imitated classic, with Hallmark subsequently releasing a series of severe foreign horror movies with titles that all riffed on the same theme, like *The House That Vanished* (1974), *Last House on the Left II* (1974), and *Last Stop on the Night Train* (1976).

Although the Hallmark films proved influential, *Love Me Deadly*, a California one-shot released in 1973, outdid all its blood horror predecessors for sheer perversity, and became an instant legend for its intense trailer and four-day Deuce run. Along with Roger Vadim's Eurosleaze snuff classic *Charlotte, Love Me Deadly* is one of the few films to expand on the subject of necrophilia.

*Love Me Deadly* opens during the last minutes of a funeral. Lindsay, a generic California blonde, leans over and kisses the corpse tenderly. The film's title is spelled out as this image is freeze-frame in negative, followed by sepia-tone shots of Lindsay as a child, playing with her father gaily as the credits unfold. The film's associate producer is H. B. Halicki, creator of the original car-crash drive-in classic *Gone in 60 Seconds*. The film was written and directed by the obviously pseudonymous "Jacques La Certe," which literally translates as Jack the Certain. Lindsay is played by Mary (aka Shannon) Wilcox, known for her exploitation films and one-shot 1970s TV roles.

Suddenly, we join a swinging seventies party filled with people with dry-look hair and hip-hugging Landlubber pants. EST graduates have touchy-feely encounters. Lindsay picks up a groovy vapid blond guy. They make out and he tries to have sex with her, but instead he winds up with a scratched face. He leaves, and Lindsay flashes back to her father playing with her, driving away the sexual tableau she just went through. These flashbacks become a running reference point through the movie.

Next we see Lindsay in her kitchen, holding a teddy bear and scanning fu-

neral notices in the morning papers. She has a more than passing interest in attending wakes, and this blatantly exposes her as a necrophiliac. Cut to a hustler, Billy Jo, standing in front of an all-male theater. A trick drives up and a giddy queen swishes over to the car first, only to be shooed away. The trick drives off with Billy Jo, who tells him, "It's $15 to make it in the car, man." For an extra $10 Billy Jo agrees to pull the job off at the trick's office. During the drive, Billy Jo spies the trick's wedding ring, and says exhaustedly, "Married? Why'd ya bother? I'm not ashamed of it."

The trick takes him to what he says is a veterinarian's office. Once they're in, the freaky trick quickly straps Billy Jo down and shoves a catheter up his penis before slitting his jugular vein. At this point, audiences feel like they've entered a sadistic serial killer's operating theater.

This exsanguination torture killing sequence is an unconsenting shock, as powerful as academician Stan Brakhage's autopsy documentary, *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes.* Subliminal shots that appears to be of an occult sacrifice are interspersed throughout the film, and director Jacques La Certe is clearly an accomplished subliminalist. During the film's less extreme scenes, the viewer still feels inexplicably nauseated and anxious.





Next we find Lindsay trolling another funeral. She steps up to steal a quick smooch off the newly departed but blanches and recoils in horror from the cadaver's reconstructed putty nose. She straightens up to see the departed's brother, Lyle (*The Carol Burnette Show*) Waggoner, in all his square-jawed glory. The sepia footage of Lindsay and her dad appears again. Lindsay trips out. Lyle looks like dad. She's in love.

But Lindsay's lyrical mood is shattered when the funeral director, who also happens to be the trick that killed the hustler, confronts her as she's leaving, forcing his way into her white Rolls-Royce and moving in on her dirty little secret. "I noticed your affection for the deceased," he says. "The word for it is *necrophilia.*"

Lindsay is bugged out by the experience but follows up on his invite to join a group of necros. The blond suitor she'd rebuffed at the beginning of the film follows her to the funeral home in his white Dodge Charger and winds up as the centerpiece of the orgy.

Lyle is an art dealer with a gallery containing paint by number look-alikes and marble phalluses for nouveau riche types. Lindsay conveniently runs into him

again, and a montage shows them falling in love, eating romantic dinners, and romping in the style of Clairol hair color commercials. They marry but Lindsay still won't have sex with him. "Give me time," she implores as soap opera music swells.

Finally, Lyle learns the sordid truth. The family maid reveals that Lindsay spends an inordinate amount of time mourning her beloved father, whom she'd accidentally shot and killed when she was a child. Her protective mother was blamed for it, but the trauma scarred Lindsay for life. Lindsay shrieks in horror when Lyle catches her at her father's grave singing "Ring Around the Rosey" and playing with a big stuffed toy bunny.

Without Lindsay's knowledge, Lyle accepts a registered letter inviting him to one of Lindsay's private parties. He follows her there and walks in to find her in an exhibitionistic nude frenzy astride a corpse, surrounded by fellow nude necro partiers. The protective funeral director, Lindsay's enabler and new accepting father figure, stabs Lyle in the stomach.

Lindsay goes home deep in shock. The funeral director gives her a shot of Demerol. "I've made him up for you. He'll be yours forever," he coos soothingly. Lindsay comes out of her drug nod to find the funeral director preparing Lyle's dead body. Jealous of his affection for her husband, Lindsay stabs the funeral director with a scalpel. Now Lindsay and Daddy Lyle can make sweet music together as the *Love Me Deadly* theme plays.

*The Love Butcher* (1973; Deuce opening 1982) was one of the paste gems in the Deuce's tinfoil horror crown. It's a meditation on an ugly freak with a dual personality, a man who treats himself as his own entertainment mannequin. By day, Lester pretends to be Caleb, his long-dead crippled twin brother, and works as a put-upon gardener tending the grounds of Beverly Hills homes. Secretly, he peeps on the lives of his employers, who are lonely, neglected, sex-starved wives. His shrew of a mother always believed Lester fell below the perfect selfness of his sibling.

By night, this sexually frustrated mess snatches the wig off his close confidant mannequin, slips into some polyester finery, and declares, "I am Lester . . . and I AM ALIVE." Lester disguises himself as a gallery of Don Juan stereotypes—a flashy record salesman, a cleaned-up rough-trade repairman, a suave doctor—sweet-talking his way into his employers' homes, where he seduces and murders

them. It's his psychotic way of punishing them for not accepting him as the gimpy nerd but only wanting him for his looks. Lost on him is that he's homely either way. One personality is just more sexually aggressive than the other.

The visual aspects of the film are unique. The movie was shot in Technoscope, the poor man's Cinemascope, which gives everything an exaggeratedly widened look and makes close-ups of a cigar ash falling look like a boulder crashing, producing a grindhouse of bellylaughs. The cast members' wardrobes are remarkable in their early-70s department store mediocrity. A neatly differentiated and fascinating cast of sub-professional actresses aptly plays the sexually needy victims.

While the violent sex murders have an interesting cheap surrealism in their fakeness, the real horrors in *The Love Butcher* are the bewigged seduction scenes, which left audiences rolling in the aisles. In real life, the Times Square audience was used to seeing such ugly messes take a few hits of different drugs, pace up and down the Deuce yammering about being God's gift to the erotically starved, then head around the corner towards 8th Avenue's fleshpots.



*Blood Couple* (aka *Double Possession,* 1973) is blood horror with a remarkable homosexual perspective. A ninety-minute exploitation truncation of the two-hour art/exploitation experiment *Ganja and Hess,* it stars Duane Jones of *Night of the Living Dead* (who always held a special heroism for Deuce audiences) and is the only movie by gay black playwright Bill Gunn, who has a cameo at the beginning of the film. Jones plays a doctor who is pricked by an African totem and becomes a vampire. He handles his addiction the way an efficient morphine addict would: He steals from blood banks. In one intense sequence that combines sex and rage in equal proportions, he kills a ghetto pimp for his fix.



*Blood Couple* contains graphic sex scenes between Jones and leading lady Marlene Clark, a big-titted soul sister. For a radical change, the sex scenes present the man's erotic responses in a more detailed fashion than the woman's. One scene towards the end—in which a nude black man with an enormous Afro and penis to match runs towards the camera in a long slow-motion scene, was cut from some prints to avoid an X rating.

By the pre–*Taxi Driver* mid-1970s, blood horror films about crazy loners began to draw huge Deuce audiences. *Hollywood 90028* (1973; Deuce opening 1975), retitled *Hollywood Hillside Strangler* for tabloid value, was a disturbing look at the life of a mentally warped but guilt-stricken porno cameraman. You get

a glimpse of the daily sickness he's exposed to when he's introduced shooting a loop. There's a midget, a whip, and a dog scurrying about, all taboo pornographic iconography. The hero befriends an actress, who tells him the requisites for being hired. "First they ask if you'll do it with a member of the opposite sex . . . then the same sex . . . then in a group. . . ." Static scenes illustrate her words with a surreal variety of stroke-book stills. At the conclusion of the film, the angst-ridden hero commits suicide by hanging himself off the Hollywood sign.

Originally released in 1975 as *An Eye for An Eye,* Larry Brown's *The Psychopath* had a short run on the Hollywood grindhouse circuit before bobbing up in Times Square in the early 1980s. Playing second fiddle to slasher movies at Deuce grindhouses, *The Psychopath* always won a better reaction from the audience than they gave to the main feature. This was a phenomenon of the pre-video days, when film fans often showed up just for the second feature replay that they loved.

*The Psychopath* opens with a young boy frolicking with an early-70s teen couple. The child's horrible, ugly mother, whose polyester threads barely sheath her rolls of fat, calls him away and verbally subjugates him.

Later, the teen couple are making out and hear noise. The guy peeks out the window and witnesses the sick scene. The mother is hollering like Junior Samples in drag as the father (in a bad silver wig that doesn't match his ugly, pasted-on silver Van Dyke beard) beats the tot with a paddle as the kid screams in agony. The mother's pig face registers satisfaction. The father looks like a pervert leader of NAMBLA. The teen boy from next door who peeps on this display is disgusted, but apparently is used to the display.

Next, we're on the set of the Mr. Rabbey show, a puppet spectacle with playlets about child abuse. The host, Mr. Rabbey, looks about 45 but dresses like a seven-year-old boy. He's got a little boy's bowl haircut, rides a bicycle, wears pullover sweater vests with button-down short-sleeve shirts underneath, and tops it all off with heavy facial pancake makeup that accentuates his gigantic brown eyes. The director of Rabbey's show, a Martin Scorsese lookalike, yells at him and Rabbey retaliates by picking up a tot, Jesus-style. Mr. Rabbey's female manager defends him to the director like an overprotective mom.

Rabbey loiters in playgrounds and boldly joins the kids on the jungle gym. He peels fisheyes at parents who he's seen jostle or be mean to their kids.

Wild, ultra-macho kung fu training introduces the LAPD. The tot beaten at

the beginning is missing. Apparently, the beating killed him. The teenage boy snitches out the slob parents, so the cops know the parents are lying sacks of shit. A cop looks up the tot's hospital records—falling down stairs, broken limbs, the whole nine yards of repeated abuse—and is repulsed.

Rabbey shows up at the hospital to entertain abused kids, bringing puppets that have the same eyelined, exaggerated eyes as Rabbey himself. To win the bored, bedridden tots over, he does a revenge-themed playlet. He gives out toys and makes silly doctor jokes, and the poor, put-upon kids dissolve into laughter.

After hearing the tragic facts of child abuse from a helpful black nurse, Rabbey jams a puppet into the cops' window and says in a high-pitched puppet voice, "All I want to know is if you're going to arrest them. That missing child was one of Mr. Rabbey's Rangers." "Jesus Christ," the cop mutters, and drives off disquieted. Within seconds, Rabbey's disturbed mind is made up.

At night, he goes to the pig parents' house. It's going to be curtains for these pricks. Rabbey prowls around, hearing them holler about who's to blame as they get drunk. The father leaves to buy more liquor. Mama Fats is left panicked, paranoid, and alone. Rabbey smirks in sadistic satisfaction.

As mom lies asleep like a beached whale, Rabbey enters the house and has his puppet peek from around the corner. He whispers "Mommy? Where's the baby?" Cut to a gigantic close-up of his Cleopatra-like eyes, then BOOM! A baseball bat to the mother's nose, which explodes in blood. Dad comes home, drinking from his paper bag. He sees her dead on the floor and runs out of the house to his car, completely freaked. But no! Rabbey's hidden in the backseat and strangles the life out of the bastard. Mr. Rabbey is on the warpath.

A bully of a mother goes hysterical on a poor little girl on a horsy ride. She's the same mouthy bitch Rabbey's seen yanking her little girl around the park before. Rabbey takes mental note of her. Later, he goes to her house, where he hears the mom debase the girl and blame her for every trouble in the world.

As soon as the kid is out of the house, the mother disquietedly smokes a cigarette in huge close-up. There is an endlessly terrified look on her face before she says, "How did you get in the house? Don't you touch me!" Rabbey chases her ass down in the garage, and snaps at her sadistically with his filthy old blanket until she passes out in fear. Spying gardening devices at hand, he selects the lawn mower and literally mows her down.

Rabbey is next hovering over the black parents whose kid was in the hospital with a busted hip. He hacks them to death in their bed like a Mau Mau as the kid's cheap K-Mart portrait smiles from their bedside table.

The nurse calls the detectives, saying some of the abused kids' files are missing from the hospital. After finding these parents dead, the cops are in disbelief. They stake out a white trash family whose abuse file was taken, and consider doing the daughter a favor by letting the parents get killed. They see the father head out to work.

Rabbey shows up at a carnival riding the ferris wheel alone and glum, looking more like a twisted teen than a child. He stuffs his face with candy and ice cream. Hot off his sugar kick, Rabbey shows up at his next victim's workplace, a tool shop. He's about to stab the father to death when he overhears a phone call during which the father tells his wife to keep her rotten temper in control. Rabbey knows then that the kid was abused by his mother, not his father, and so cuts the guy some slack.

Even though the cops are stationed outside the wife and kid's apartment, keeping watch, Rabbey somehow sneaks in and overpowers the wife. As he's menacing her with a hot iron, the little girl grimly shoots Rabbey to death, putting him out of his misery. For good measure, she also calmly shoots her no-good mother.

*The Psychopath*'s star, Tom Basham, is a shocker whose disquieting presence single-handedly carries the film. His Mr. Rabbey is one of the most infantile men ever to appear in exploitation film, and plays against audience expectations by being a highly moral man rather than a pedophile. Basham is only known for one other film, *The Pink Angels,* the first and only gay biker film, in which he played the leader of the pack.

Director Larry Brown was largely known for making gay X-rated features, and *The Psychopath* is one of his few stabs at straightforward exploitation filmmaking. There's a disturbing sexual undercurrent to the movie, beginning with the teenage couple making out as the child abuse plot is introduced. The casting methodology that Brown applies to *The Psychopath* is the same as in a hardcore film: Everyone has an exaggerated, too-apropos look and manner. The cast is so believable that you think the actors were selected straight out of child-abuse police reports. *The Psychopath* also has a creepy edge in that the kid actors really

are getting their arms yanked and are lying across laps of men they don't know to receive light but grim-looking spankings.

While many members of the Deuce audience cheered on Mr. Rabbey's acts as heroic, *The Psychopath* is certainly not the only movie to play 42nd Street that employed child performers in an inappropriate way. *Devil Times Five* (1974) was a popular second feature following its initial appearance on the Deuce, where it sometimes ran under the creepy moniker *People Toys.* It went on to gain a sort of infamy because of the appearance of future pop star teen sex icon Leif Garrett in the cast.

*Devil Times Five* opens with a group of quarrelling adults that have to spend a frozen weekend at the resort of a bullying patriarch named Papa Doc. The movie gets going with distasteful humor about the infantile sexuality of a retarded handyman, intercut with a bedroom catfight. A minibus carrying adolescents to an insane asylum overturns, and the kids make their way to the resort. The kids are all freakish role players. The oldest girl impersonates a nun; a little black boy won't let go of a Green Beret fetish; and Garrett, clad in a loud polyester suit, enjoys impersonating a sexually jaded adult. Naturally, the kids take control of everything and kill each adult in a gruesome way. *Devil Times Five* is one of the most morally twisted movies to ever play the Deuce, thoroughly distasteful from beginning to end. The audience would laugh occasionally, but then would grow disquieted.



The film's director, Sean MacGregor, was known for taking potential investors for rides in his Learjet to get them in the mood to part with their cash. MacGregor's most notable works include *Camper John* (1973), a bloody, axe-murdering saga featuring biker star William Smith, and *Nightmare County* (1972), a mix of a redneck melodrama and blood horror movie that had a two-day-long run on the Deuce in 1981. In the latter, MacGregor himself stars as a progressive political candidate in a town where the local hicks have been harassing a hippie commune. Most remarkable about *Nightmare County* is a jolting ultraviolent scene in which a woman's face is pounded to shreds in a mirror.

By the end of the 1970s, blood horror on the Deuce took on an increasingly misogynistic tone. When *The Toolbox Murders* (1978) opened as a second feature to George Romero's *Dawn of the Dead,* it surpassed the headliner in its shocking ultraviolence. Its technical professionalism only adds to its sick quality, with

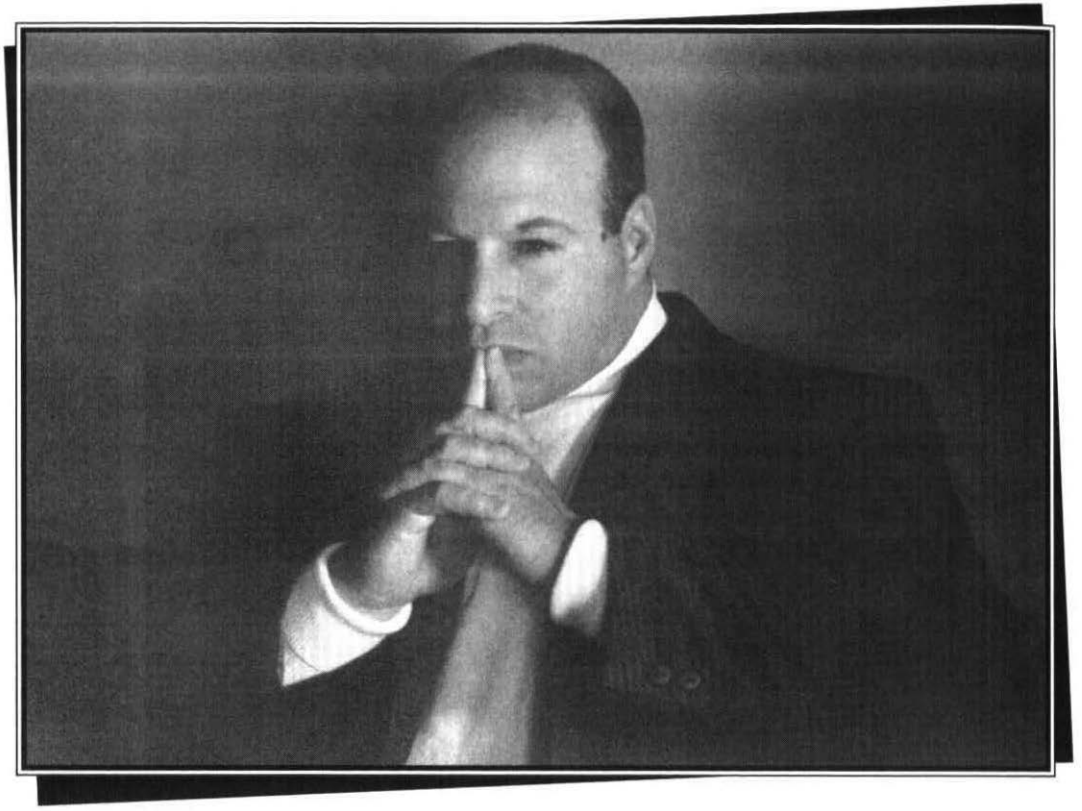
many of the cast members recognizable from cheap television programs of the day. Wearing a Hawaiian shirt and sporting a cheap new face-lift, Cameron Mitchell gives his best cinematic performance as a psychotic apartment super in an L.A. singles complex. He murders women he feels fall below his moral standard, using the tools of his trade: screwdriver, hammer, and drill. The most jarring scene depicts Mitchell killing a victim with a nail gun after she's had an orgasm while masturbating in a bathtub. In the background, a wimpy country-and-western tune repeats "pretty lady . . ." The scene was all the more disturbing to Deuce audiences because the murdered woman was Kelly Nichols, a well-liked porn star around the neighborhood.

Mitchell eventually kidnaps Pamelyn Ferdin and begins the violent outburst that stands in for the money shot. Imagining the kidnapped teen to be his dead niece, he gags her and ties her to a bed as she makes a cross and sweats. He then serenades her with a pathetic rendition of "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child."

*The Toolbox Murders* is one of the most bizarre, grisly, disturbing, and kinky blood horror offerings to ever hit the Deuce. The movie was another feather in the cap for its extraordinarily prolific cinematographer, Gary Graver, who'd shot many major exploitation hits and had been in the director's seat for several hard-X productions.

*The Toolbox Murders* wound up featured on *60 Minutes* as an example of misogyny in film—which only helped its notoriety and box office grosses. Along with *Bloodsucking Freaks* (1976) and many horror films of the time, the film was arousing feminist ire by being more feature-length torture/snuff loop than actual narrative horror film. In a cynical sense, commercial films finally got to do what they wanted, which was to cater to the large male audience that enjoyed seeing women tortured, brutalized, and murdered. Yet the feminists, with their endless yakking and constant pipeline to the media, only wound up playing right into exploitation's greedy, sweaty palms. To quote one director, "Any publicity is good publicity."

Following this maxim, the ever-outrageous Jerry Gross released the notorious *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978), a severe sexual roughie that wore the horror movie mask. Film critic Roger Ebert took issue with the film's ugly tone. Some people felt he was attacking exploitation itself, but what really appalled Roger was the in-



The psychopath's psychopath, Nicholas Worth, in *Don't Answer the Phone.* (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)



difference he saw in the audience, a completely blasé attitude towards the suffering of another human. Originally titled *Day of the Woman,* the movie is the graphic depiction of the hunt, capture, and rape of a woman by four louts and of her revenge, employing the ultimate cure-all of castration. Camille Keaton, granddaughter of the silent comedian Buster, lends an unexpected *Hollywood Babylon* tawdriness to the proceedings as the film's tortured star. In that myopic, egomaniacal exploitation way, director Meir Zarchi—a one-movie Israeli wonder—told an audience of Columbia University film students that his genius should merit a place alongside Fellini in the film pantheon.

While lesser blood horrors of the time tried to compensate for their conceptual limitations by pressing down the misogyny pedal, the year 1980 marked the release of one particularly inspired performance, namely Nicholas Worth in *Don't Answer the Phone* (1980). Resplendent in turtleneck, flared slacks, and navy pea-

coat, the hulkingly effete Worth gives a brilliantly detailed star turn as a deranged Vietnam veteran. The ultimate horror film crazy loner, he cruises Hollywood Boulevard in his Chevy Monte Carlo, looking for hitchhikers and wannabe models of whom he can take beaver photos before strangling them. Between these episodes, Worth makes crank calls to a radio show shrink, putting on a shrill Mexican accent, calling himself "Meester Ramon," and complaining of headaches and blackouts.

Worth lures Sue Ellen, a hitchhiker from the Midwest, back to his apartment for a photo session, and in a grandmotherly tone lectures her about accepting rides from strangers. Sue Ellen can't believe she's going to be a famous model. "Yes, it is like a dream. More coffee, Sue Ellen?" After she balks at being handcuffed for a photo, he calms her nerves and tells her, "You'll look like a *real* gang girl." "You must do lots of research," she marvels. "Research, my dear, is the key to my success," he answers. "*Lots* and *lots* of research. Now, this is how they transport prisoners." Sue Ellen gets The Fear and wants the handcuffs off. "Why surely," he answers, then strangles her while saying, "I like it, I like it . . . I love it, I love it," with a mixture of tears and euphoria.

Worth then shoots a speedball with a hooker in a fleabag hotel off Hollywood Boulevard. He murders her and beats up her black pimp. After mimicking the pimp in ebonics before his mirror, which is garnished with religious paraphernalia, he begins bitching at his dead father, letting loose with the best line ever heard in a blood horror film: "Are you *proud* of me Dad? . . . do I *measure up?*" Worth addresses his own image, standing shirtless, popping cool Budweiser's, pounding his beefy chest, an emotional wreck.

During a climactic rampage, Worth matter-of-factly tells a soon-to-be-dead model who recoils in horror at his bondage portfolio, "*Personally* I think they're my best work. I'm sorry that the photographs rubbed you the wrong way, but we all have to make a living, *don't we?*" We do. *Don't Answer the Phone* fetishizes Nicholas Worth as the psychopath's psychopath.

Worth did a lot of research on mental illness and psychosis for this role, and it shows. His headaches, sexual dysfunctions, drug use and run-ins with pimps, prostitutes, and dirty bookstore owners are all on the money for Times Square audiences, who knew the type. Worth became an icon to the Deuce audience, who would applaud when his bulky frame would make its first appearance, filling the

screen. Many stayed to watch the film over and over. The film is cited as an influence by many Deuce denizens. Porn actor George Payne, who played the leading heavy in the hardcore Avon S&M films, explicitly acknowledges studying and emulating Worth for his own bathetic interpretations. An essential part of Times Square from the mid-1970s through the mid-1980s, Avon films like *Taming of Rebecca* (1979) and *Kneel Before Me* (1983) copied the blood horror genre, and were ranked by the Meese Commission Report on Pornography as the most extreme, violent, and foul examples of 1980s American porn.

Meanwhile, mainstream Hollywood was riding a wave of horror success after releasing *Halloween, Friday the 13th*, and their inevitable sequels, all of which borrowed from the dullest aspects of the blood horror genre. Sensing a broader market, exploitation filmmakers Xeroxed the majors' favored form of stalker horror, churning out films devoid of imagination and entertainment value. The Deuce was infested with the slasher cycle, and the audience quickly grew bored and disappointed by each new film that clipped their ticket money.



Mercifully, in 1982, a little parachute of obscure 1970s California horror movies dropped on the Deuce, many from the legendary Hollywood Boulevard distributor Boxoffice International. In *I Dismember Mama* (1974), Zooey Hall plays criminally insane rich boy Albert, an insouciant insane asylum inmate who's Little Lord Fauntleroy disposition tortures everyone he comes in contact with. Albert's got a hateful mother fixation, teamed with an equal fascination with preteen girls. "My mother is a whore," he offhandedly tells his psychiatrist. "In the Middle Ages, she would have been stoned to death." "But this is not the Middle Ages," the shrink impotently whines.



Albert escapes from the institution by distracting the bald, mustachioed gay male nurse with porn loops, then strangling him to death. He flees to his mother's house, where he terrorizes the housekeeper into stripping to the waist while singing "Let Me Call You Sweetheart" to him. After Albert kills her anyway, he abducts her little girl, Annie, and takes her on a pedophile date to a lyrical park. They check in at an elegant hotel, but a shoefaced, trenchcoat-clad detective (*Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* star Greg Mullavey) is waiting to corner the sick creep.

*I Dismember Mama* is held together by Zooey Hall's galvanizing performance, a Method masterpiece melding of sexual pervert and strong-arm mur-

derer. The movie was intelligently shot on a shoestring budget by director Paul Leder, who achieves a deft balance between jarring shock scenes and the twisted yet humanly believable narrative. Leder's daughter, Mimi, would eventually achieve mainstream success as the director of such Hollywood productions as *The Peacemaker* and *Deep Impact.*

Another compelling no-budget Paul Leder film, *My Friends Need Killing* (1973; 1985 Deuce opening), began making the rounds of the Deuce in the mid-1980s. Greg Mullavey appears again, this time playing a shell-shocked Vietnam vet who knocks off war buddies in repellent ways while suffering battle flashbacks. *My Friends* is one of the most primitive, minimal movies to ever hit the Deuce, ninety minutes of grainy 16mm blowup, endless long shots sans cutaways, and San Francisco travelogue filler. Mullavey is most spectacularly used when a giant close-up of his nose opens a scene in which he breaks up a not-so-happy heterosexual household, raping the wife and murdering the husband. In the operatically grotesque conclusion, Mullavey delivers a woman's baby after murdering her husband. Thoughtfully, he then hangs himself. It's Mullavey's perfect role.

Another Boxoffice International product, *Axe* (1974; Deuce opening 1982) is a minor classic in the horror genre. Subtle and utilizing minimal sets and incidents, the film opens as three hoods—quietly sadistic Steel (Jack Canon), obese Lomax (Ray Green), and conscience-stricken Billy (writer-director Frederick Friedel)—brutally beat a homosexual to death. Lomax and Steel then amuse themselves by vandalizing a convenience store, terrorizing its homely cashier with William Tell shooting games and throwing Coca-Cola on her breasts. The thugs force themselves into a farmhouse occupied by a paralyzed old man (Douglas Powers) who spends his days before a malfunctioning TV set as his granddaughter Lisa (Leslie Lee) periodically feeds him. Lisa, a Darwinist who gently caresses a chicken before decapitating it, proves more than a match for the three troublemaking losers. The minute one of them even *looks* at her grandfather, you know it's curtains for them.

*Axe* possesses a sophisticated and unique cinematic syntax. The dialogue is lean and convincing. The narrative progresses via brilliant, disquieting imagery. Mental imbalance is suggested by broken eggs and bloody chicken feathers. Lomax's character is defined by his cheap blue suit, massive girth, and cigar smoking as much as by his malevolent criminal actions. The violence is simulta-

neously suggestive and graphic. When Lomax tries to rape Lisa, she dominates him by slitting the back of his neck, his bloody rejected corpse lying dead atop her. As she dismembers him in the bathtub, the chopping sounds become hellishly loud as the camera cuts to her grandfather's face, followed by a shot of her silhouette as seen from the house's exterior. The scene concludes with Lomax's tie in the blood-filled tub as Lisa washes it away down the drain with finality.

*Axe* is a hallucinatory film, inducing a claustrophobic, intense feeling of being trapped with the characters. The atmosphere of the North Carolina settings adds flavor, and the cast of unknowns works beautifully. Leslie Lee, with her perpetually distant expression and faraway eyes, creates one of the most haunting female characters in exploitation films, as resolute in her task as her grandfather is in watching the static-ridden TV. You sense that he took care of her growing up and that she's sadly resigned to caring for him—and will unquestionably demolish anyone who threatens him or her capacity to care for him. *Axe* is a miracle of concision, packing much nuance into a running time that's just slightly over 70 minutes.





While this troika of Boxoffice International offerings kept Deuce moviegoers happy during lean times, two new blood horror entries—*Boardinghouse* and *The Black Room* (both 1984) stood out in the mid-1980s.

Imagine if the crowd in Richard Linklater's *Dazed and Confused* grew up into unfulfilled mid-1980s L.A. denizens and got called back to school to complete a drama project. The result would be *Boardinghouse,* a microcosm of tacky early-1980s Americana, from its characters' terrible New Wave clothes and big hair to the cheap pocket-Casio synthesizer music. At the time it was made, the film was unusual in that it was shot on video and transferred to film. The resulting bizarre, surreal look was hyped in exploitation style as "Terrorvision" and has the look of a porno video edited for Japanese TV. Only avant-gardist Fernando Arrabal—in his disturbing 1971 film *Viva la Muerte*—had previously achieved this sort of video-to-film visual impact.

The film uses a tangential telekinesis plot to explore the world of two unattractive narcissists. Jim (Hawk Adley, a pseudonym for director John Wintergate) is a salesman who can use his mind to make plants jiggle and soap bars dash around his tub. John's nom de film "Hawk," only adds to the tacky Hollywood lack of substance. He looks like the archetypical 80s freebaser, with a curiously mus-

cular body capped by a skeleton head with sunken, black-ringed eyes. He's like a plant that lives off sooty L.A. smog.

Jim shrewdly turns his cheapo pre-fab suburban house into a $100 a month share for a gaggle of girls, playing their swingin' Svengali, though getting curiously little sex. One of Jim's tenants, Victoria, is a prototypical rock chick with dark hair and exaggerated Hellenic features. She's fawned over by the other girls, and is so self-obsessed that her room is festooned with posters of herself. Victoria and the other girls set out to match Jim's metaphysical trickery, with bloody freak accidents resulting.

*Boardinghouse* is partially a *16 Magazine*–style vehicle for one-name actress Kalassu, who plays Victoria as well as singing the third-rate rock on the soundtrack. The film is as self-involved and vapid as its protagonists, an ode to the 1980s that can dance on the head of a pin. Yet as a viewing experience, it's surprisingly likeable and entertaining. The 42nd Street audience enjoyed it, chiming in with their own male snipes at Jim for not fucking any of the girls.

In contrast to *Boardinghouse, The Black Room* is a darkly erotic story about a bored suburban couple saddled with two bratty kids who constantly invade their sexual intimacy. The father ends up breaking from the pressure. He rents a room in a hilltop Hollywood Hills home owned by a freakish brother-sister couple. The exotic sister is recognizable from the cover of Jefferson Starship's *Dragon Fly* album. The muscular yet effete brother suffers from a rare disease and is into shooting up blood. The husband takes the room, which he uses for quickie sex with Quaaluded college girls and cheap streetwalkers he picks up. This twisted brother-sister gives the husband a private area for his erotomanias tripping out. Unwittingly, the husband is supplying the brother with a steady blood fix when the duo capture and use his sex pickups for exsanguinations.

To rekindle his suburban sex life, the husband starts telling his wife supposedly made-up sexy stories set in an imaginary "black room," but when the wife finds a slip of paper in his glove compartment that confirms the room really exists, she turns the tables on him. The next time the husband comes by his swing pad, he's surprised to see his wife being balled. The blood-addict brother relishes watching the husband have a nervous breakdown. By the end, the couple, their children, and their teenage babysitter (future scream queen Linnea Quigley) are almost annihilated by the brother-sister duo in a creepy but all-too-believable

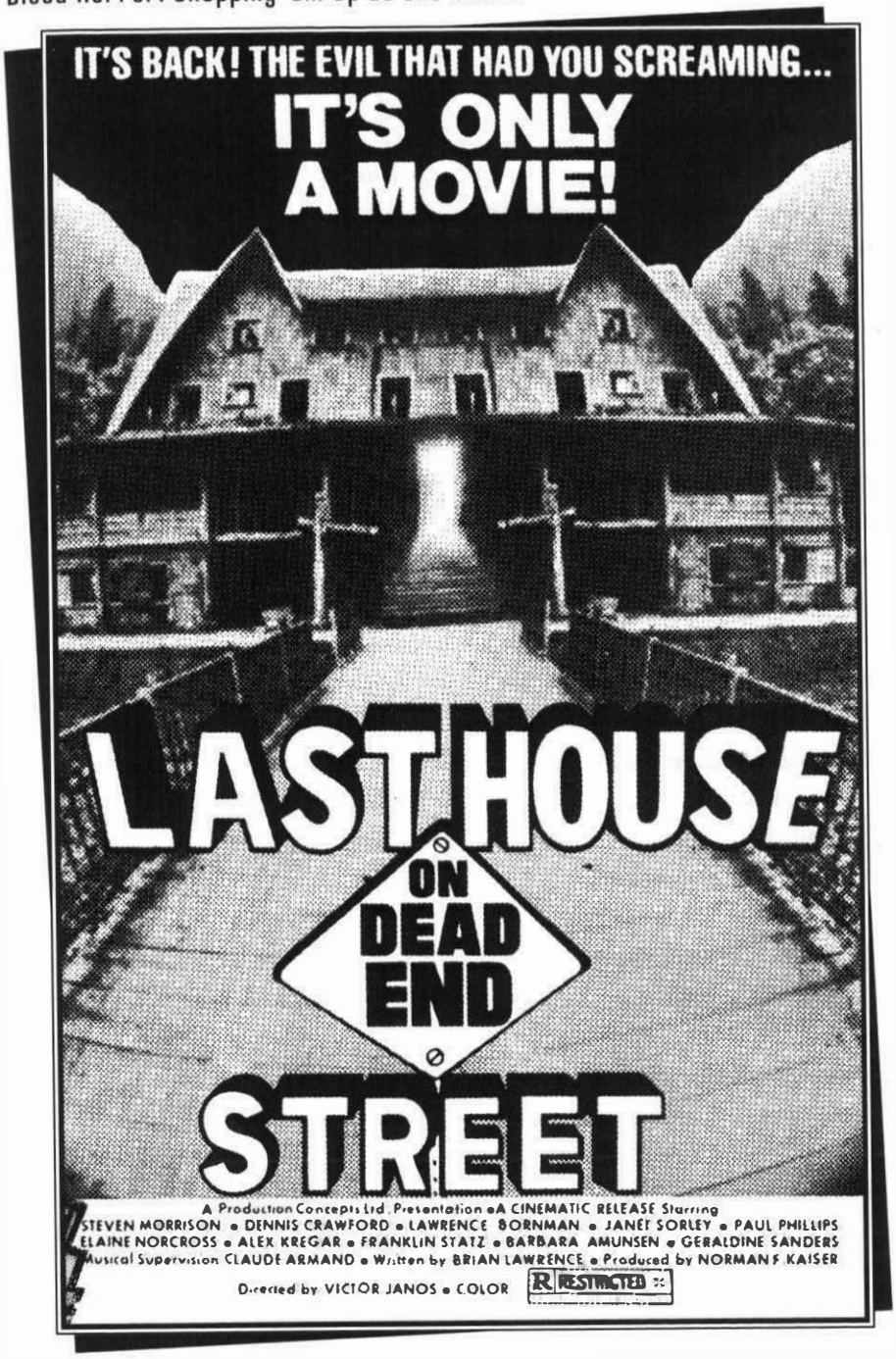
Hollywood Hills situation. It's the ultimate frightmare of the bored married man's search for casual sex going horribly wrong.

Moody and well executed, *The Black Room* held Deuce audiences spellbound. It's a quiet movie, yet it delivers swinging, kinky sex and metaphors for hard drug use. The implicit moral—that there's a price to pay for partying—was one that everybody in the theater knew all too well. Unique in the male-dominated blood horror universe in that it was directed by a woman, Elly Kenner, *The Black Room* also reversed the rules of the Italian giallos, where people allow sexual psychopaths in their own homes. Here, the ugly Americans go out naïvely and fall into destructive hands.

*The Black Room* was the last worthwhile blood horror film to play the Deuce's grindhouses before they felt the cool breeze of the wrecking ball, but in the entire blood horror universe of madness, murder, and mayhem, however, one film stands out for forcing the grizzled Deuce crowd to clutch their stomachs and chairs in disbelief, nausea, and shock. *Last House on Dead End Street* (aka *The Funhouse,* 1977) has both revolted and fascinated *Sleazoid Express* since Mr. Sleazoid first caught it at the Cine 42 Twin in 1977. At the 1999 Sleazoid Film Festival at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, Mr. and Mrs. Sleazoid screened the film as a lost horror classic. It was the festival's opening night shocker. Although almost three decades old, the movie had lost none of its power to impress and appall. It even drove two couples to flee the theater, one girl asking aloud, "What kind of a person could make such a thing?!"

*Last House* opens with goth music playing over minimalist white-on-black credits that list a slew of pseudonyms. They're followed by wintry, foreboding shots of an old building. A prominently visible "State University of New York" sign reveals its upstate New York location.

The protagonist, Terry Hawkins, walks into a decrepit old building. Clad in a black leather jacket, with long greasy hair and an ugly, angry mug, Terry looks like someone who'd sell speed at a Black Sabbath concert. His aggression provides the film's centrifugal force. Terry's voice-over internal monologue complains about six months wasted in the joint for selling drugs. He's been told that he's got nothing going for him in terms of talent, but he still wants to be somebody—he wants to "show the world," as he puts it. Tweaked on crystal methamphetamine and primed to break out in a speed psychosis at any minute, Terry's a psychopath out


IT'S BACK! THE EVIL THAT HAD YOU SCREAMING...
IT'S ONLY A MOVIE!
LAST HOUSE ON DEAD END STREET
A Production Concepts Ltd. Presentation • A CINEMATIC RELEASE Starring
STEVEN MORRISON • DENNIS CRAWFORD • LAWRENCE BORNMAN • JANET SORLEY • PAUL PHILLIPS
ELAINE NORCROSS • ALEX KREGAR • FRANKLIN STATZ • BARBARA AMUNSEN • GERALDINE SANDERS
Musical Supervision CLAUDE ARMAND • Written by BRIAN LAWRENCE • Produced by NORMAN F. KAISER
Directed by VICTOR JANOS • COLOR
R RESTRICTED

Original poster for *Last House on Dead End Street*, one of Times Square's zeniths of hate. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection, courtesy Roger Watkins)

to make as much trouble as he can before those inevitable prison doors go *clang bang clang* again. Intercut with the cold minimalist character development scenes are revolting, red-lit depictions of Satanists in clear-plastic Halloween masks disemboweling a woman and licking her blood. These flash-forwards initiate the film's distinctive brand of unwelcome shocks, which sicken the viewer and indicate what its antagonist Terry is embarking on: a sex magick working with blood sacrifice.

A blind man passes Terry, tapping his cane in a foreboding gesture. Hawkins visits his creepy pal Ken, who bitches about his job in a slaughterhouse while images appear of a cow being killed. Ken himself has spent some time in stir for a particularly odious black sex magick working: fucking a dead calf. "You know how horny you get, you just jump on anything!" he whines. "You're a weird one, Ken," chuckles Terry. "Oh, people, they just don't understand," Ken laments to his twisted pal. Ken and Terry brag of turning out college girls—young disaffected girls who get high are drawn to the type of violent sex aura Terry exudes. Terry schemes aloud about making kinky stag movies. Ken mentions balling a swinger named Nancy Palmer whose husband makes loops for a sleazebag named Steve. Ken hints at Nancy's masochistic tendencies, noting, "She's into the ol' slaperoo."



Then it all comes out like loose shit during drug withdrawal. Terry was burned by the pornography operation that employs the Palmers, and is out for revenge. Now he's found some nice sitting-duck targets, so he begins assembling an entourage of disaffected freaks to help him get his retribution. He barges his way into the apartment of Bill, a schlub crew member whom he'd stolen from at an earlier point. As is true of everyone else in the film, Bill quickly acquiesces to Terry's bullying, just like a trained dog.

When we first encounter Terry's chronically depressed female cohorts, the movie turns unexpectedly solemn and meditative. Two plain, dark-haired girls—one of whom sports a mouthful of bad teeth—apply makeup and talk themselves into working in Terry's films. In an interior monologue rivaling Godard's or Antonioni's sense of ennui, one girl recalls how a guy tried to pick her up in the bus station the night before. The man wanted sex, but she could only stare into her coffee cup.

The quiet mood creeps in as Nancy Palmer applies blackface in her bedroom while her houseguests start cavorting downstairs. Things quickly rev up into a

kinky swing party with Nancy as the centerpiece, getting mercilessly whipped by a hunchback. Excruciating close-ups of her sweating, contorted face fill the screen. Meanwhile, her husband sits upstairs stroking a cat and screening some of his latest pornographic efforts to his producer, Steve. With his cheap tinted sunglasses and bulging girth, Steve bears an uncanny resemblance to Mal Worob, the low-level pornographer who shot the tacked-on phony murder footage defacing the Findlay film *Snuff* in 1976.

At this point, *Last House* treats us to a sequence of Mr. Palmer's porn loops. There's some soapy bathtub solo scene and a lesbian coupling involving Mrs. Palmer. A crewmember walks a dog past the camera, lending the footage the scent of zoophilia. As Mr. Palmer tries to play up the quality, his boss complains that the loops need to get freakier and more interesting. They just aren't good enough.

The porn movies that Terry makes are filmed in the same abandoned building where the old blind man from the film's opening is the groundskeeper. Terry has his girls feel up the disgusting old geezer, who's as foul as one of the Mexican beggars in Buñuel's *Los Olvidados.* The blind man then inadvertently becomes the star of Terry's first snuff movie: Terry dons a wicker man mask and his girls, all wearing domino masks that recall old stags, chant, "We're Terry's vampires . . . we're all vampires" as Terry strangles the sightless pervert to death.

Terry pays a visit to Nancy Palmer, pulls his pants down, and fucks her up against a wall. Afterwards, he screens some of his freshly shot snuff for her. She's turned on by the intensity of the blind man loop, but a little put off by Terry's insistence that it was real. Terry invites her and her husband to the abandoned building for more kicks. Then all hell breaks loose. Continuity falls by the wayside. You're not always sure who the victims are or why everything's happening, which only increases the film's terror-inducing impact.

Nancy, her husband, and another woman are suspended by ropes. Terry ties one woman to a bed, softly whispers some sexual psychobabble, and brands her with a hot iron. Mr. Palmer is beaten to death. As Ken maniacally puts on his surgical gloves, Nancy becomes the focal point of a snuff orgy. She's tied to a bed, her faced is sliced apart, her limbs are cut off, and her insides are ripped out. Whenever she starts to black out, the gang wakes her with smelling salts. It's one of the most revolting scenes in exploitation history, and is guaranteed to reduce even

the most jaded viewers to quivering disgust. Back when the film was out, stills of this scene had been reproduced in sleazy *Violent World*–type 70s crime mags. In an obscene parody of childbirth, Terry's gang licks Nancy's blood as Ken holds up her entrails to the camera. People on the Deuce sat stunned and sickened, but unable to leave their seats.

Later, as Steve watches Terry's cinematic record of his murder mayhem, Terry pops in his office and knocks the books off his desk. "Welcome to the land of the living, Steve." Steve runs out the door and bumps right into a rotting corpse with a mutilated face.

As the hideous cat-and-mouse game continues, Terry's gang finally corners Steve. One of the girls removes her shirt and begins groping her crotch. Setting the stage for this final black sex magick working, another girl holds animal hooves over her head. She unzips her fly to reveal a deer foot, prompting Terry to deliver the movie's signature line, "Are you horny yet?," as his gang erupts in gales of laughter. Steve is forced to fellate the deer foot in close-up before the gang viciously executes him with a drill to his eyeball.



A voice-over tacked on later by the distributor announces that Terry Hawkins and his cohorts were sentenced to 99 years in the pen.



As with Godard's bloody nihilistic film *Weekend* there isn't one sympathetic figure in *Last House.* Both protagonists and antagonists are equally repellent. Terry Hawkins is the most sexually driven antagonist in exploitation history, the ultimate horror movie insider anti-hero, a walking id who makes a spectacle out of torturing his foes to death while receiving Manson-like adulation from his concubines and male assistants.

*Last House* is a film within a film motivated by a hate of pornography and the swingers who create it. The pornographers Terry exterminates are easy targets. What goes around comes around in the porno underworld, and Terry Hawkins makes this code his law, filming his targets as they take their last undignified breaths. In this sense, ugly as it is, the film is the ultimate sexual revenge movie.

Just watching *Last House* involuntarily increases one's tolerance to shock. The movie sticks to a consistent, purposeful style that builds to the foulest mood imaginable, creating its own world of hate. In that unintentional exploitation way, it reproduces the Panic Theater extremes of surrealism, where evisceration is a metaphor for the sex act. Similar images appeared in Arrabal's *Viva la Muerte,*

when the hero hallucinates that his mother is sewing him up in the flesh of a freshly slaughtered cow and incestuously kissing him, all while a mariachi band plays in the background. *Last House* is also a bastard cousin of Otto Muehl and his "happenings," as bloody animal entrails spill over nude humans.

The film disappeared theatrically but resurfaced in an edited version on the exploitation-fueled Sun Video label in the mid-1980s. When Sun closed, the movie vanished yet again. Then tenth-generation versions culled from Venezuelan television began making the rounds on the collector circuit. The movie was uncut, with all the horrific footage intact, and the Spanish subtitles and visual distortion of degenerated duplication render these versions all the creepier.

Over the years, *Last House* has developed into a rosetta stone for the hard-boiled clan of narcissistic misfits who call themselves nihilists. They masturbate to the words of Charles Manson and Anton LaVey; they play-act at Darwinism but are a sexually inept, frustrated crowd. Born followers drawn to negativity and hate, their only turn-on is tragedy, chaos and suffering—though not their own, of course. That'd hurt. Many of these submorons like believing that *Last House* is an actual snuff movie because it's filled with a cast of unknowns and was made by an anonymous director.

For years, the film has been a psychotic mystery. No one knew who directed or performed in it, or what happened to them—nothing. A bloody mess of an exploitation movie developed a "Phantom of the Opera" enigma. In particular, speculation mounted about who the credited director, "Victor Janos," really was. An acid/speed-laced SUNY student? An Italian lowlife (because of the film's dubbing)? A Son of Sam wannabe (because of its fixation on filmed snuff)? Or a pornographer with inside knowledge of the subject matter and a chip on his shoulder?

The enigmatic Victor Janos is actually Roger Watkins. Best known by his nom de porn, Richard Mahler, Watkins directed popular porno-chic features like *A Taste of Money, Midnight Heat, Her Name Was Lisa,* and *Corruption,* all major Times Square adult house hits. *Last House* was his first feature film, and is almost a primal scream against having to make a living as a pornographer. Did Terry Hawkins see Richard Mahler in his future and react violently?

As a kid growing up in upstate New York, Roger enjoyed reading about horror films in *Castle of Frankenstein* and other monster magazines, and became ob-

sessed with celluloid when a neighborhood friend showed him some old black-and-white *Felix the Cat* cartoons on his projector. He loved how you could stop film as if stopping time, and was immediately drawn to the fun of seizing time to play with as he liked. His mother indulged him with his first 8mm camera and his father, a World War II vet who worked at a developing lab, encouraged his son's artistic efforts by bringing home film and doing his son's developing for free. Roger's first efforts feature his friends playacting horror scenarios for him, including some based on Edgar Allen Poe stories, while others experiment with forms: One animation short centers on a mechanical monkey, and one bizarre opus stars an armless female mannequin who makes her way to the boy's room for some fun.

Predictably, Roger was a sadist refugee from parochial school. One of his boyhood films shows him in a leather jacket with the collar turned up tough-guy style, brandishing a fastidiously tied noose, a glare in his beady little eye. The shape of things to come—a junior Terry Hawkins. *Ronrico,* his signature adolescent film experiment, concerns the misadventures of a disabled protagonist (played by an actor with legs and arms bound to simulate amputation) who's robbed in an alleyway by thugs, exploited by a pretty blonde girl, and keeps returning to a church where a Hitlerian priest sits on the steps. A girl in a nun's habit considers a statue of the Virgin Mary, narcissistically admires herself, smokes a cigarette, and takes her own virginity, bloodying a candle.

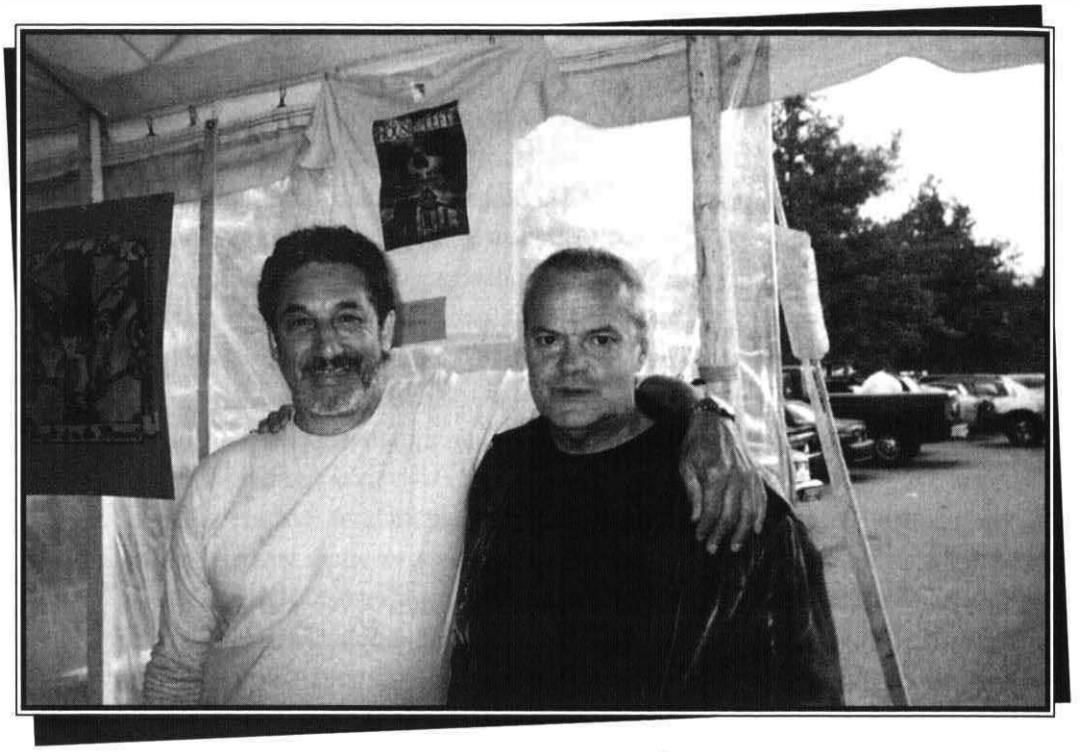
Roger studied literature at SUNY in upstate New York while simultaneously teaching himself film and becoming friendly with people in the film department. Desperate to get his show on the road, he pursued apprenticeship with directors. He met and studied irascible eccentric Otto Preminger, who took him to the wraps of *Such Good Friends* and gave him the Bolex camera he later used used to shoot the snuff movies in *Last House.* Watkins heard Nick Ray was teaching at SUNY Binghamton and made a pilgrimage to meet him. Ray had directed such subversive 1950s classics as the lesbian western *Johnny Guitar* with Joan Crawford and the pill-addiction-fueled *Bigger Than Life,* which starred James Mason as the quintessential 1950s family man addicted to cortisone (as a euphemism for speed). Ray was a lifelong drug addict and infamous sexual predator. On the set of his biggest Hollywood hit, *Rebel Without a Cause,* Ray was having simultaneous affairs with Sal Mineo, James Dean, *and* Natalie Wood.

When Roger met Ray, the director was in a state of aesthetic decomposition. Having lost all interest in filmmaking, he was instead participating in events like Amsterdam's *Wet Dream* porno film festival, judging the entries alongside the notorious Euro-porn director Lasse Braun. Receiving mentoring from a great artist who has fallen into a downward spiral can be destructive to fresh talent: Instead of getting insight into Ray's best work, which might as well have been made in another lifetime, Watkins wound up getting high with his idol, shooting methamphetamine and entertaining surprise drop-ins like Dennis Hopper, who was hallucinating that little men were behind the light switches. Roger was thrown out of the house for laughing at the two loaded Hollywood messes. Later, he worked with Ray on a never-released movie starring Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor.

Watkins sparked on the idea to do *Last House* while reading Ed Sanders's book *The Family,* which chronicled the Manson Family's filming of satanic snuff/sex loops. Watkins became obsessed with recreating the whole Manson affair. He had a particular fascination with former Manson right-hand man and Kenneth Anger muse Bobby Beausoleil. On the outside, Bobby was a sneaker-pimping ladies' man, but eventually he was fucked over by a bigger predator/mentor who landed him in serious trouble. Watkins loved Beausoleil's "fuck you" to the world that had sentenced him to death. "I was always obsessed with guys like Beausoleil," Watkins muses. "I mean, *they're not afraid of anything.*"

Watkins made *Last House* in 1972 with a $1,500 loan from his father that basically paid his rent, kept him high on methamphetamine and a dash of heroin, and put him to sleep with booze every night throughout the shoot. As always, Dad also contributed and developed all the film he needed. Watkins shot the film in narrative sequence. The budgetary and location constraints altered his original concept, and his drug binge amplified the film's extremist qualities.

The movie initially went unreleased because one of its actresses, Barbara McGraw, sued over Watkins's use of hardcore loops he'd shot of her. Throughout his career, Watkins photographed everything from animal slaughter in *Last House* to the horrors of mental illness, filming unconsenting asylum inmates—some of them naked, some of them elderly and begging him to stop—at an upstate mental institution. Watkins enjoyed filming sadism and suffering. While waiting for the doors of mainstream filmmaking to open, Roger was invited into pornography.



Horror's heavies: David Hess and Roger Watkins, Chiller Theatre convention 2001. (Photo: Art Ettigner)



Most of Watkins's hardcore films center on pain, and many have death-related themes. *Her Name Was Lisa* was made when Roger's producer told him to make a film with his daughter's name in it. "And have her in a casket," he added. *Lisa* is a portrait of a Manhattan skank on the make, opening with her funeral, during which her life is seen in flashback. Roger's film *Corruption* was a pact-with-the-Devil affair in which George Payne raises hell and performs necrophilia, and a leather-dad Bobby Astyr shoots a balling couple to death in yet another refraction of Terry Hawkins. There are pieces of Roger strewn all over his films.

People in the hardcore realm remember the on-set Roger Watkins as much like Terry Hawkins with a camera, a loaded egomaniac quick to anger and given to verbal explosions. One producer remembers an ugly scene of Watkins bullying and belittling a cameraman for no other reason than to relieve his own anxiety. Watkins ultimately found himself in a situation not unlike Roberta Findlay, shooting porn for one of the most foul, misanthropic, despicable men in the adult film biz, a universally loathed skeeve.

In 1979, during the porno-chic era, Watkins was working in the Film Center building on 44th Street and 9th Avenue when he was approached by a guy who said he'd seen him in a movie on the Deuce, throwing animal guts around. That's how Watkins became aware *Last House* was actually playing somewhere. Later, he'd find out that the film had also played two years earlier, enjoying a successful Southern drive-in run as *The Funhouse*. He had sold the movie for small change to a fly-by-night Westchester County distributor called LBS Productions and wasn't aware they had done anything with it, let alone that it had turned a profit.

With his friend Paul Jensen, who'd played the old blind man, Roger rushed to the Deuce to check out his film. He loved the crowd's reaction, recalling that "the black guys in the audience were recommending it word of mouth by saying, 'Oh, you gotta see this. This movie is really insane!' " He loved seeing himself on screen 50 feet tall, menacing and repulsing the Deuce audience.

Some blood horror directors went to Hollywood and graduated to directing TV series or movies of the week. Some, like Watkins, sunk lower, back into porno careers, and were always bitter about never seeing any residuals from their enormously profitable films. The father of blood horror, however, made out the best by leaving exploitation. Herschell Gordon Lewis was always *aware* that the films were a one-time sale, a freelance job from which he'd see no residuals. Kissing the Rialto good-bye, he applied his marketing knowledge to writing successful direct-mail campaigns. For years, Lewis was rumored to have spent a brief stint in a white-collar jail, on a charge of making referrals to an abortion clinic. He's denied it, but it's only built his myth. His book, *Herschell Gordon Lewis on The Art of Writing Copy*, has attained a classic status in ad copy fields, including web publishing. Lewis suffers from none of the self-hatred that many exploitation directors embrace. He chuckles with satisfaction that every time he gives a symposium or talk, "someone has a poster or material from one of my films that they want autographed."

# seven

# Taking Their Show on the Road: Times Square Mondo Movies

**The eponymous Times Square Theater, located smack in the middle of 42nd Street** between 7th and 8th Avenues, was your prototypical Deuce grindhouse. During the 60s, it showed triple bills of westerns to Popeyes, inner city denizens, kids playing hooky, and bored Midnight Cowboys. In the late 1970s, the Times Square alternated chop-socky flicks with exploitation double bills on half-week runs. This Friday-through-Monday, Tuesday-through-Thursday schedule was unique to the Deuce.

The Times Square had two balconies. One was officially closed to discourage sleepers, as well as to keep tourists out of danger from unsavory types. Nonetheless, crafty tenderloin prowlers would hop the velvet rope to get high, crash, trick, or to sneak away through the boiler room maze after picking a patron's pocket. The oft-frequented popcorn and hot dog stands were near long, dark stairwells with so many twists and turns that it was impossible to see who was coming around the next bend. This catacomb led you to the toilets, where the aroma of urine socked you in the face. In spite of all this activity, the auditorium's main aisles sustained a mellow pulse.

Like the nearby Empire Theater, the Times Square was a classic time-killer that gave audiences the most for their $1.50 to $2.50 admission when other houses charged $3 to $4.50. It was virtually a parking post, and people would sit around for hours. A skinny junkie would come out of his nod to see three men eyeballing him, but they'd go back to watching the movie when they realized he'd spent all his money and had none left to rob.

Early morning, summer 1995: The Times Square Theater defaced with government-sponsored sarcasm masquerading as poetry. (Photo: Michelle Clifford)

A quintessential exploitation genre, Mondo movies create their own unique equation in the algebra of shock value. While the genre had its ups and downs, it was a Deuce staple from the 1950s on, playing grindhouses like the pre–*Blood Feast* Rialto, the Apollo, and the Times Square. When the genre experienced a full-fledged rebirth in the 1980s, the Times Square earned a reputation as *the* Mondo showcase. Indeed, the films provided such extreme shocks that viewers would pay the increased admission of $3 to $5 for the experience.

Explained simply, Mondo films use a documentary or educational pretext to present jarring scenes of real-life sex and violence. The hoary roots of the genre can be found in the roadshow-era exploitation movies of the 1930s and 1940s, and even older ancestors like *Trapped by the Mormons* (1922), an S&M-oriented silent that pretends to be a cult exposé. Anything became fair game, be it a disgusting look at advanced syphilitic genitals in *Sex Madness* (1938), the wacked out cult of flagellants in *Lash of the Penitents* (1939), where the overexcitable

narrator occasionally flubs his one-take reading; or even the baby-birthing footage in Kroger Babb's phenomenal hit *Mom and Dad* (1945).

In the 1950s, as the Civil Rights movement was being born, cinematic carny barkers like Babb preyed on white Americans' paranoia and fear, producing films that told the shocking living truth about "savage" Third World people—the darker their skin, the more barbaric they were. Blacks were speaking out for their rights and guys like Babb were going to show you exactly how they *weren't* the same as whites.

Mondo prototypes like Babb's *Karamoja* (1954) were instrumental in making the genre a Deuce staple. *Karamoja* deals with a Congo tribe that exploitation producer/distributor David Friedman recalled as "a pretty disgusting bunch who'd cut the throats of their cattle and drink the warm blood as it came out and rub themselves with the dung of animals to ward off evil spirits. The first thousand feet everybody throws up. [Kroger Babb] made a fucking fortune on it." Friedman picked up *Karamoja* after taking over Babb's distributing operation.



Noting the success of rogue independents like Babb, American International Pictures, the most mainstream of exploitation distributors, pounced on this trend with their provocatively titled *Naked Africa* (1957), which dealt with African Zulu tribes and had a poster that proclaimed "primitive passions unleashed" above a drawing of a fakir driving a nail through his tongue. In 1961, Deuce exploitation king Joseph Brenner released *Naked Terror*, which included nauseating scenes of "the water truth test," in which a tribe's suspected liars have their arms thrust into scalding water.



The proto-Mondo film achieved some measure of mainstream respectability with the 1961 release of *The Sky Above, the Mud Below*. A documentary about an ill-fated expedition to New Guinea, it focuses on a group of exhausted, fair-featured European adventurers who bump shoulders with pygmies, headhunters, and cannibals while being attacked by swarms of insects and leeches. By the end of the film, three of the native guides are dead and thirty members of the expedition suffer from dysentery, malaria, and other calamitous illnesses.

A Mondo trendsetter, *The Sky Above* delivered the raw sock-it-to-me traumas that the Deuce audience demanded, with a dash of *Men's Adventure* pulp as an added spice. At the heart of the film is the fundamental, terminal taboo that would drive the Mondo genre in years to come: the injury and snuff of both ani-

mals and human beings. Yet the picture's documentary format actually conned many a critic into taking it seriously, as if it were an extended *National Geographic* special. This favorable press and wide distribution through minimogul Joseph Levine's Embassy Pictures ensured that *The Sky Above, the Mud Below* reached an audience beyond the grindhouse crowd. Ultimately, the picture won an Oscar for best documentary.

Within two years, however, the Mondo film would come into its own through the efforts of one particular director. Exploitation film is filled with questionable characters, men of shady or non-repute, men using moviemaking to play out sexual manias, men for whom the moviemaking process is a byproduct of or smokescreen for their illicit activities. Even in such extreme company, Gualtiero Jacopetti still manages to stand out as a devil-may-care, depraved hedonist with a life packed with controversy and scandal. He was born for the job.

Jacopetti was born in 1919 in the Tuscany area of northern Italy, the only child of an upper middle class family. His first experience in journalistic showmanship came when he wrote news about Italy's 1920s colonial wars in Africa on his class blackboard. This proved a formative experience, sparking a lifelong passion for Africa as a source of adventure. With the hope of being stationed there, he joined Mussolini's army as soon as possible, but instead was sent to Albania. Jacopetti's subsequent life experiences would compact enough grizzle into him that he could chuckle at the thought of his fascist army days.

After the war, Jacopetti had a brief, whimsical stint as an actor, a profession that appealed to his inherent narcissism but didn't pay the bills, as he never made it past bit-part/extra status. Jacopetti found more success in the manic, shock-driven vocation of traveling photojournalist, where he became famous when working for the Italian *News from Around the World* newsreel service. These featurettes were similar to those shown during the 1940s in America, except the Italian counterparts always tossed in some sexual *Violent World* spice. Using a free-associative approach, Jacopetti became seasoned in capturing "newsworthy" scenes of the macabre and offensive, along with sexually fetishistic material. He became the eyeball peeking into hell and bringing it home.

In the mid-1950s, Jacopetti's private perversions went public with the first of many scandals to occur throughout his life. He made headlines in Italy with his Jerry Lee Lewis–type "zingarella" ("Lolita") case, in which the father of his

thirteen-year-old concubine forced him into a shotgun marriage. He later obtained an annulment by claiming impotence, even though the girl soon gave birth to a premature baby by him.

Jacopetti began directing feature-length films by shooting some segments and writing part of the narration for *Europe by Night* (1959), a collection of risqué film clips from various cities on the Continent that made stopovers everywhere from transvestite nightclubs to Paris' famed Crazy Horse Saloon striptease. A hit in Europe in late 1959 and in the U.S. soon after, *Europe by Night* was a kinky warm-up to the Mondo movies that followed.

When shooting the film, Jacopetti became romantically linked with actress Belinda Lee, who was known for appearing in the fetishy British St. Trinian's girls' school comedies and various sword-and-sandal productions. But this union didn't prevent Jacopetti from treating the globe as his sex receptacle. In 1960, while in Hong Kong filming parts of his upcoming *Mondo Cane,* Jacopetti was caught in his hotel room with two girls, ages ten and eleven. He wound up spending three months in the local jail, and in that unapologetic pedophile way, later claimed he had done no wrong, insisting that "the two girls were prostitutes and I paid!"

In 1961, driving drunk from Las Vegas to L.A. with Lee and several others from his film crew, Jacopetti was involved in a terrible highway accident in which Lee was killed. Jacopetti almost lost an arm, and declared that he'd never fall in love again. Shortly thereafter, though, he crept into the Italian scandal sheets Roman Polanski style, photographed at public events accompanied by much younger women.

Focusing on his film career, Jacopetti found a capable cohort in Franco Prosperi, who was banging out scripts for cheap sword-and-sandal movies to pay the rent. Together, they would team their forces and transform the world into their own Punch-and-Judy show, snickering in contempt at their audience like the zoo monkey in the old *Hustler* cartoon, laughing at a black man who visits his cage.

In 1963, Times Films released their collaboration, *Mondo Cane,* on the Deuce and throughout the United States. An import company with an eye for sex films like South America's *Lollipop* ("her loves up to the age 13" proclaimed the tag line), Times immediately glommed onto the commercial possibilities of *Mondo Cane,* which was a sensation in its initial 1962 Italian release. *Mondo Cane* literally translates as *A Dog's World,* and its title sequence of a mongrel being dragged

to the pound sets its pessimistic tone. A supposedly ironic look at man's foibles, its potpourri of film clips set the template for Mondo films to follow. The general scheme juxtaposes sickening "native" rituals with the boorish behavior of purportedly civilized westerners. Surprisingly, real sequences outnumber obviously staged ones among the movie's thirty segments.

Highlights include Samoan women becoming eligible for marriage when they weigh in at 300 pounds, while their western counterparts work themselves to exhaustion trying to keep trim at a Vic Tanny gym. Drunk working-class Germans in a beer hall punch each others' faces and laugh hysterically. Inspired by Jesus's suffering, Sicilian peasants bloody their legs with broken glass in a passion play parade. The homeless, ill, and aged spend their last hours in Singapore's dreaded "death house." Shark-maimed fishermen with missing limbs are seen still plying their trade in Malaysia.

Animal abuse plays a central role in *Mondo Cane,* from its opening at the dog pound to scenes of women force-feeding geese to obtain pate de foie gras. Snakes are skinned alive in a Hong Kong market, and Gurkha warriors decaptitate steers. In a characteristic juxtaposition, footage of pooches visiting elegant grooming salons in the U.S. is followed by scenes of them being served as delicacies in the Far East. An elegant Manhattan restaurant serves jet setters insects as haute cuisine.

Another comic-relief episode embodies Jacopetti's notion of the comedy that is lust. Italian sex symbol Rossano Brazzi is shown having his clothes torn off by overamped female fans. For titillation, Jacopetti shows 16-year-old female lifeguards on an Australian beach demonstrating mouth-to-mouth resuscitation on very pleased, passive men.

*Mondo Cane* ends with an effectively ironic scene of a New Guinean cargo cult. The mocking narrator tells us that after seeing a jet only once, they built an airstrip complete with wooden planes that they believed would take them to paradise. It's a concept that Dennis Hopper later elaborated on in his own film *The Last Movie.*

*Mondo Cane* employed its reality-based approach to show the most extreme footage that Jacopetti and Prosperi could get away with playing in theaters. After the precedent of *The Sky Above, the Mud Below,* Times Films knew that *Mondo Cane*'s documentary format would give the film little or no censorship trouble.

Although it has its slow moments, *Mondo Cane*'s random, roulette wheel

presentation gives it a kind of joy-buzzer effect overall. One never knows what to expect next—will you laugh or puke? The kitschy philosophizing of the narration and the heavyhandedness of the visuals create a unique universe of bad taste. Stunning pre–mod era color photography adds to an already potent mixture. It delivers the exploitation movie requisites of shock value, violence, sex, and grotesque comedy, and continues to fascinate almost four decades later, personifying the misanthropy it ostensibly criticizes, morally implicating the viewer by default. *Mondo Cane* is ultimately more symptomatic of man's foibles than a wry commentary on them.

Predictably, when the film was initially released, critics didn't know how to react. Was it a cynical comment on humanity or a mere carny show? In retrospect, it's surprising that the film received as much good press as it did. *Life* magazine ran a large story on it and the New York *Daily News* found it "fascinating". Times Films capitalized on the good press quotes and promoted the film heavily, stressing shock, travelogue, and human-interest value. "Enter a hundred incredible worlds where the camera has never gone before!" read its tantalizing catch-line.



Stateside, *Mondo Cane* was a runaway box office success, drawing a wide audience beyond the usual exploitation crowd. People who would never dream of seeing *Blood Feast* went to *Mondo Cane.* Its catchy, radio-friendly theme song, "More" by Riz Ortolani, Nino Oliviero, and Norman Newell, appears in dozens of variants throughout the film and proved a quintessential piece of Italian movie scoring, eventually becoming a pop standard. Most people still can't imagine it as emanating from a groundbreaking exploitation movie directed by a borderline pedophile.



Joseph Levine immediately capitalized on *Mondo Cane*'s success by releasing Jacopetti and Prosperi's *Women of the World* (1963). *Women* uses its documentary pretext to present a lot of leering sequences, from female Israeli soldiers bathing after grueling, filthy combat training to lesbian nightclubs in Paris to the "children of the night" footage Jacopetti shot in Hong Kong before being busted with the two underage prostitutes. In pure Jacopetti fashion, the film ends with footage of tragically deformed female thalidomide babies and scenes of their mothers going to Lourdes to pray for a miracle cure.

*Mondo Pazzo* ("Crazy World") is Jacopetti and Prosperi's sequel to *Mondo Cane.* Released in Italy in 1963 but not distributed stateside until 1965, the movie

is more extreme than its predecessor. Repellently continuing the "dog's world" concept of the first film, it begins with footage of English scientists cutting dogs' vocal cords before vivisecting them. Real-life human horrors include the famous dramatic footage of a Buddhist monk torching himself to protest the Vietnam War. The movie also includes a lewd but brief S&M torture chamber sequence, a dash of cross-dressing, and a scene of American cops in drag trying to catch muggers and sex offenders, and its portrayal of Indian fakirs performing incredible mind-over-body human-pincushion stunts inspired the inclusion of similar footage in Mondo films that would follow.

The film ends with glimpses of a Congo slave auction, in which human sell themselves due to the destitution of their villages. To prove their strength to potential buyers, Africans smile obligingly and heartbreakingly as beatings raise welts. The narration features maimed African slave children getting tortured "for educational value." Jacopetti and Prosperi can't resist sticking the viewers' hands in the blood.

*Mondo Pazzo*'s exploitative qualities are as obvious as a $2 wig on a bald man. Unlike its predecessor, the movie didn't elicit a wave of critical fascination, and it was more difficult to pawn off its insistent vulgarity as part of the documentary impulse. Less refined but shorter and occasionally more shocking than *Mondo Cane, Mondo Pazzo* has a disturbing edge in which Jacopetti himself comes to personify the inhumanity that he's supposedly commenting on.

Other popular Mondo films began popping up throughout the mid-1960's, all heralded by big, lewd ad displays at Deuce theater lobbies. *Slave Trade in the World Today* (1964) is based on official British government reports that human beings were still being sold on the Dark Continent through Arabia. *Slave Trade* is a weird emulation of bloke tabloidism by Italians. The filmmakers, Italians with dubbed British accents, turn themselves into cast members by constantly flashing their "hidden" tape recorders and cameras, as when they record the words of a bloke pilot who's witnessed the slave trade. Officials of then newly formed African nations like Kenya and Uganda, sweating in English-style offices, tiredly admit that the slave trade exists and complain about how difficult it is to stamp out. An African woman is sold to the filmmakers in the jungle with a handshake from the dealer. It's the most curious scene in the movie, as casual as buying a pack of cigarettes, and embodies one of the paradoxes of the Mondo genre: It would be

ridiculously easy to stage, but seems inhumane enough to be authentic. *Slave Trade in the World Today* had a provocatively kinky ad campaign of a woman being dragged by a chain.

To lend the proceedings a fake patina of respectability, Mondo movies were prone to feature famous actors with recognizable, dignified voices delivering the narration. Peter Ustinov narrated *Women of the World. Taboos of the World* (1965) and *Mondo Balordo* (1967) used Vincent Price and Boris Karloff, respectively. Both actors had distinctive voices familiar from horror movies. *Ecco* (1965) featured the reedy British voice of George Sanders, who shortly thereafter appeared in drag in *The Kremlin Letter* and eventually committed suicide.

*Ecco* delivered on its promise to showcase strong, varied, and unusual scenes in spades. It included footage of the Grand Guignol's final performance, Laplanders castrating reindeer with their teeth, chicken blood used in a black mass, and German college students slashing each other for twisted kicks in duels. The focal point for *Ecco*'s campaign was Evon Evah, a Frenchman in a Van Dyke beard who demonstrates his fakir abilities with a demented giddiness by sticking a needle through his neck and wiggling it.



*Taboos of the World* contained jarring footage of a Japanese Yakuza amputating his little finger, as well as a sad mass for a group of lepers. *Mondo Balordo* had less shock value, but included scenes of the druggy religious rites of India's opium dens. All three movies were assembled with consummate style and skill: They're the cinematic equivalent of little red Fiat sports cars.



*Malamondo* (1964) and *Macabro* (1966) were both narrated by notorious publishing reprobate Marvin Miller, who released bootlegged Henry Miller novels and the unauthorized *Hollywood Babylon* as dirty paperbacks. One of the most extreme Mondo movies was *Sadismo* (1967) which relentlessly lived up to its ad catch-line, which promised "an authentic catalog of cruelty." To satisfy that part of the Mondo crowd into barbarous natives, *Sadismo* starts with footage of fertility rites and animal sacrifices. Outdoing *Mom and Dad,* it goes on to exploit a cesarian birth. Finally, it ups the ante on tastelessness by playing newsreel footage of Nazi atrocities. The movie's main sex appeal, exploited in the ad campaign, comes from its tackily staged but relatively explicit and lengthy medieval torture chamber sequence. The film was so offensive that it was withdrawn for cuts a

month after its initial opening in 1967. It had been released without any MPAA seal, but still ran afoul of local censor boards.

Not to be outdone, in 1967 Jacopetti and Prosperi released *Africa Addio,* their most controversial movie yet. Shot in Africa over a three-year period during the political upheavals of the time, the movie runs to two long hours and is surprisingly dull, considering that it alternates florid, lyrical wildlife and nature shots with scenes of actual executions and animal slaughter. Jacopetti used war as an excuse to shoot and play snuff footage, showing Arabs massacred in Zanzibar, mercenaries hunting for rebels, and a pile of severed native hands in the aftermath of battle. While filming, Jacopetti almost became a casualty himself, and had to be rescued from a firing squad in Dar es Salaam. Safely back in his native Italy, he quickly wound up in court again when he was accused of having bribed Africans to perform some of the executions for his film. He was later acquitted.

*Africa Addio* documents what was widely heard, yet rarely seen, from the Dark Continent during the last bloody stages of its battle against colonialism. Perhaps for this reason, the U.S. critical reaction to the film was surprisingly favorable, although *The New York Times* recognized Jacopetti and Prosperi's anything-for-a-shock exploitation approach, noting its obsession with "Slaughter, hideous and horrible—of animals, human beings, political systems, social institutions." The *Times* chastised *Africa Addio* as "a reckless, dangerous film."

For lighter fare closer to home, certain hot spots of sin or recreation easily lent themselves to the Mondo format, as with *Mondo Hollywood* (1967) and *Mondo Daytona* (1968). *Hollywood* is unwatchably inert but includes the curious presence of several individuals later implicated in the bloody Manson Family crimes. Manson cohort Bobby Beausoleil plays Cupid addressing his bow. Future Manson victim Jay Sebring is shown flitting around his movie star's hair salon. There's also pimp Jack Gerard, who "agented" women (including many of the Manson women) into strip clubs and skinflicks.

The youth-oriented *Mondo Mod* (1967) had narration by Los Angeles DJ Humble Harve, who was known mostly for giving the intro on the live Sky Saxon & the Seeds album. Shot largely around Hollywood, it includes scenes of the Sunset Strip riot, surfing, and the Whiskey-A-Go-Go, as well as a peek at the pot and acid consumption of the hippie era. *Mondo Teeno* (1967), also known as *Teenage Re-*

*bellion,* was a Brit/American coproduction that featured teens of many nations involved in sexual freedom, drugs, and fashion. The shocks here are child prostitutes from Japan and young Italian homosexuals, and following the *Mom and Dad* ethos, the movie concludes with payback, showing an unprepared, unwed teenager giving birth.

Everyone got in on the Mondo act with their specialty, using the shockumentary format to slip fetishistic material past censors. Kinky sexploitation innovators Bob Cresse and R. L. Frost initially worked on touch-ups for *Ecco* before making their own variants on the genre, *Mondo Bizarro* and *Mondo Freudo* (both 1966). For these projects, Cresse and Frost utilized a slew of pseudonyms to flesh out the credits (including Felix Lomax, David Kayne, and Seasu Hakasami) and indulged the Cresse-Frost sadomasochism specialty in various staged scenes. Young white women and black men are auctioned off like cattle in an Arab slave market. Japanese nightclub performers are flogged, as is a girl at a neo-Nazi club. And as per the Mondo requisite, the films included footage of a fakir piercing himself with pins.

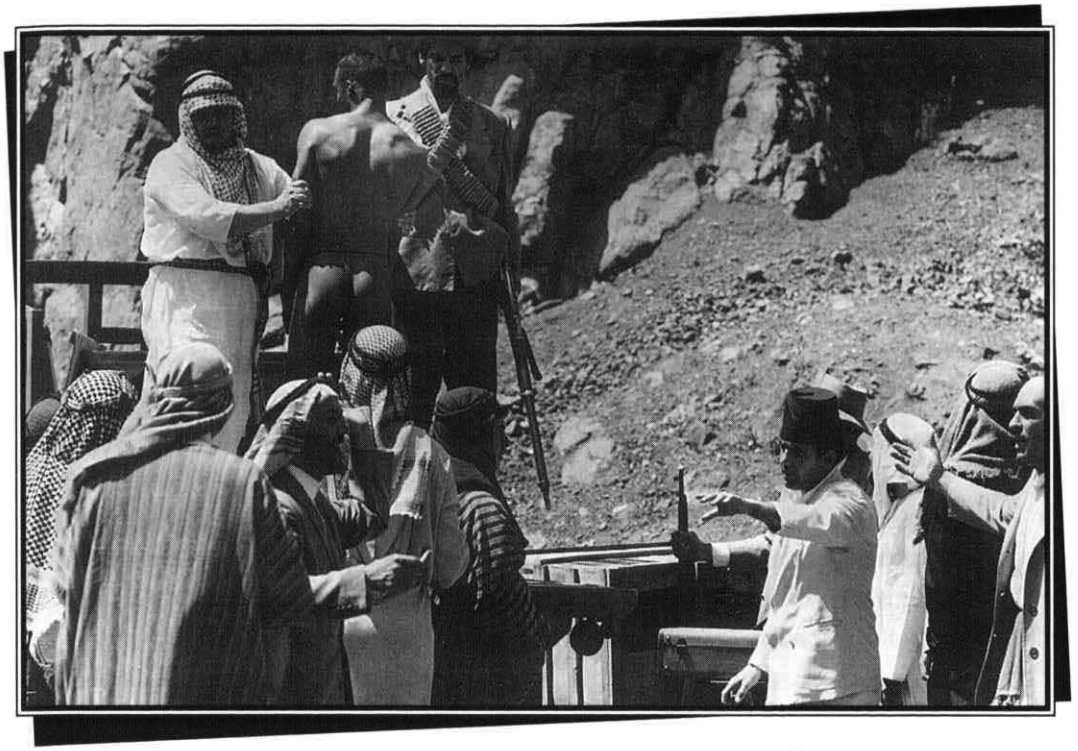




Just a year after Jack Ruby assassinated Lee Harvey Oswald on national TV, Texan auteur Larry Buchanan made *Mondo Exotica* (aka *Naughty Dallas,* 1964), a documentary on Ruby's strip joint, the Carousel Club. Stan Borden strung together footage from his classic S&M *Olga* series to create *Mondo Obscenita* (1966), even tossing in some scenes from his mixed-combo baby-birthing import *My Baby Is Black.* In *Mondo Topless* (1966), Russ Meyer got his piece of the action by presenting strippers with supersized breasts at work, dancing in the middle of the desert, driving topless, and being interviewed about their bra sizes. Pioneer homosexual exploitation producer Pat Rocco created a 163-minute anthology feature called *Mondo Rocco* (1970) by putting together his lyrical shorts of nude young men he'd found preening around Hollywood Boulevard.



By the late 1960s, the Mondo genre entered into camp and the word itself had become synonymous with anything tacky, bizarre, or deliberately shocking. John Waters, in an exploitation tribute, titled one of his first films *Mondo Trasho* (1970). The genre's commercial possibilities seemed to have peaked, but just when you thought the end was coming, distributor Jerry Gross started the ball rolling again by repackaging *Mondo Cane* and *Mondo Pazzo* as *Mondo Cane 1* and *2.* The bold catchline read, "DOUBLE SHOCK SHOCK! YOU WON'T BELIEVE YOUR EYES!"



Obsessional exploitation king Bob Cresse plays out his S&M mania with a slave scene auction in *Mondo Bizarro*. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection, courtesy Something Weird Video)

Thrill-seeking audiences still came to see the films big and bad on the grindhouse screen, even though a heavily edited *Mondo Cane* was showing at the same time on local TV.

Spurred on by the success of this double header, Gross rereleased Jacopetti and Prosperi's *Africa Addio* as *Africa Blood and Guts* (1970). For publicity, Gross hired out-of-work black actors through a classified ad in the trade paper *Showbiz*, outfitted them with grass skirts and spears, and stationed them in the lobbies of Deuce grindhouses that were showing the film. He cut the film's running time down by a half hour, cannily concentrating on its shocker highlights.

The pioneering duo of Jacopetti and Prosperi would continue to outdo everyone for tastelessness. In the fall of 1972, Hollywood darling film critic and total snob Pauline Kael stumbled into Times Square. Pauline occasionally wrote about exploitation movies from a holier-than-thou standpoint, treating the films and

their audiences with outright contempt. One day, she was looking to catch a blaxploitation movie to put down.

Too apprehensive to enter a really intense Deuce grindhouse like the Times Square, Pauline kept to the relative safety of the Cinerama on 47th Street and Broadway. Expecting another *Shaft* escapade, she instead was assaulted by Jacopetti and Prosperi's *Farewell Uncle Tom* (1971). (Euro release 1971; Deuce opening 1972) Pauline was so appalled by the movie that she popped off about it at length in her *New Yorker* column, unintentionally giving it a greater status than other exploitation films.

Similar critical reactions from all corners accompanied the movie's opening. Although well publicized and attracting a curious Times Square audience, *Farewell Uncle Tom* quickly became a thorn in the side of Christopher Dewey and Dennis Friedland's Cannon Film Distributors. Friedland and Dewey were not proud of the exploitation films they released, and *Farewell Uncle Tom* was not only raising an ugly stench, but soon proved difficult to book. Moreover, the film was saddled with an X rating, and was far more sexually explicit and perverted than conventional pornography. And who could tell if it would hit a ghetto audience in a really wrong way, insulting viewers to such an extent that they took their displeasure out on the theater? Cannon quickly shelved the movie.

*Farewell Uncle Tom* has always held a special fascination for dedicated sleazemongers because of its garish ad campaign, grotesque stills, and Pauline Kael's lathered overreaction. Around 1980, *Sleazoid* attempted to rent a print of the film for an exploitation festival. Cannon, which had just changed ownership, angrily denied owning any more prints or even knowing where they wound up.

However, in the video age, *Farewell Uncle Tom* (aka *Goodbye Uncle Tom, Uncle Tom,* and, in its native Italian, *Addio Zio Tom*) resurfaced in Greece and Australia and was quickly bootlegged to the States. Some video dupers complained bitterly that their copies even had the credits hacked off, but they put the film in circulation anyway. It's no surprise that *Farewell Uncle Tom* has found its niche in the collector pantheon: It is one of the most insane film productions ever embarked on, confirming everyone's worst suspicions about the directors' humanity. At the same time, it's a showcase for the duo's flabbergasting skills as filmmakers. It's just that they happen to be dedicated to the hideous.

The film opens with a sweeping aerial shot of a cotton plantation. The shadow

of the helicopter reflects on scores of black extras costumed as slaves, waving to the camera. A little white girl lyrically runs through a field with a black boy on a chain, setting the tone.

Once we're inside the plantation's mansion, Prosperi and Jacopetti's off-screen voices announce that they're doing an "inquest" into slavery, a conceit sustained throughout the movie. The filmmakers interview various Southern whites at the dinner table, under which little black kids scramble around like dogs hoping for chicken bones. Some of the Southerners refer to Prosperi and Jacopetti as "macaronis" and "slaves to the Pope," providing one of the film's many curious ethnic twists. The whites generally comment that blacks are inferior. A woman playing Harriet Beecher Stowe declares that she's writing a book called *Uncle Tom's Cabin* because, although she believes the inferiority theory, she feels slavery is inhumane.

What ensues is a lengthy collection of real and staged atrocities presented in Prosperi and Jacopetti's unmistakable style—but amplified to the point of hallucination. Lyrical nature shots are punctuated by blunt shocks, and Riz Ortolani's fife-and-drum score runs through dozens of permutations as the movie progresses, just as his "More" theme had connected *Mondo Cane*. Jacopetti and Prosperi worked on *Farewell Uncle Tom* for three years, from 1968 through its completion in 1971. That's a lot of time and obsession to devote to such a deranged exploitation project. It's clear that through making their previous Mondo movies they learned well the technique of manipulating their Third World subjects into acts that would otherwise be unthinkable. They shot the film mostly in Haiti, with the full cooperation of the atrocious Duvalier dictatorship, which let the filmmakers push around the populace like puppets. As one watches the results, one grows painfully aware that the extras are debasing themselves for a bowl of rice.

*Farewell Uncle Tom* offers a view of a slave ship with blacks packed in like cattle and corks shoved up their asses so they won't shit and mess up the boat. During a group enema scene in a veterinarian's office, a barely audible, dubbed-in voice with a Southern accent comments that one slave must be a homosexual because of his joyous response to this anal attention. The slaves are then deloused, bathed en masse by hose, and checked over like livestock. Black women are raped by whites as little black children watch. A baby is dragged through a feeding

trough as a white overseer comments, "Them niggas are shrewd. They always know how to fill their bellies."

A costumed marching band wearing purple suits and top hats brings the slaves to auction. Little twin boys smile as they're put up for auction, their arms around each other and their nude bodies painted silver, in a revolting pedophiliac scene. A potential buyer inquires, "How can I be sure they're really twins?" In a strange anticlerical twist that runs throughout the movie, nuns discuss buying little slave boys like they're toy poodles. You get the impression that there's no love lost between the Vactican and Prosperi and Jacopetti.

A sidecar appears, painted "Prosperi and Jacopetti, Traveling Photographers." Our two filmmakers are joining in on the hate. They interview a bespectacled slave who's up for auction and who epitomizes Malcolm X's theory of the origins of "the house nigger." He claims he does better than freed slaves: He works a short week, has free medical care (for what that's worth), is exempt from military service, and eventually will have a comfortable retirement on his massah's estate. His massah would never whip him because the marks would lessen his monetary worth. Jacopetti and Prosperi disgustedly refer to him as "that puppet."



A black dwarf in loud clothes shows off the "bucks" and "mares" for sale. The sequence ends with the dwarf standing in front of a gigantic black man with three balls and yelling, "He's got THREE!" while the shamed man covers himself and the camera lens with his hands.



A white massah invents his own prayers and sleeps with one of his "wenches," but is dissatisfied when he discovers she's a virgin. A big mammy slaps her around and supplies a replacement. The new wench talks about how much she favors white men over blacks as she's about to get fucked, doing a POV seduction to the camera.

Jacopetti and Prosperi reveal their animal-abuse inclinations when a pig is slaughtered and cooked so the smell of food will lure runaway slaves out of hiding. As they appear from out of the swamp, slaves are shot down in bloody slow motion. Production manager Giampolo Lomi has a cameo as one of the slave hunters.



Incredibly, *Farewell Uncle Tom* becomes more and more shocking as it progresses. There's a visit to a Jewish scientist, who, with his hooked nose and exaggerated Semitic features, looks like something out of the notorious Nazi prop-

aganda movie *The Eternal Jew.* He refers to blacks as "neither man nor beasts." Holding up a vial of a black man's sweat, he scientifically compares it to an animal's. The scientist has cages filled with black men wearing elaborate muzzles to prevent them from eating their own shit in suicidal depression, or in pillories to prevent masturbation. Bewildered-looking black men stand and walk in bizarre bondage contraptions. The Haitian cast members don't know what's hit them. They stand there in shocked disbelief, looking at these jaded, fetishistic guidos holding cameras. A huge black penis is viewed in shadow, held up by the scientist with barbeque tongs who claims its size has rendered it useless. A gaggle of armless and legless extras charge at the camera in unison, playing slaves who were gangrene victims or who've mutilated themselves to escape plantation work.

If you haven't already puked, there's still time. The visit to the breeding farm is one of the hardest scenes to take in *Farewell Uncle Tom.* Naked, pregnant black women are fondled by the owner; the men are given names like Casanova and are branded. A bloody birth scene ends with the slave breeder saying to the filmmakers, "I'll name him in honor of you—Macaroni!" A delicate black woman is mated with a savage stud to end the sequence.

From here, *Farewell Uncle Tom* veers into its mesmerizingly surreal conclusion, which is unlike anything else in the annals of cinema. Shots of modern-day Miami's entangled freeways set the mood. A black minister walks down the sunny streets. He's got an enormous Afro and is carrying a well-thumbed paperback copy of *The Confessions of Nat Turner,* William Styron's bestselling late-1960s radical-chic historical novel. A passing car swerves into a puddle, splashing him, and he curses under his breath.

The minister reads from *The Confessions* as he sits on a beach populated by repulsive white sun worshippers. He imagines Nat Turner's slave rebellion as if in flashback, with a white voice reading the text. Montage suddenly compares the white Southerners to the contemporary whites lying on the beach. Cut back to the minister's imagination. A baby is thrown into a wall during the Turner uprising as the minister sees a tot in a playpen on the beach. A snoring old Jewish retiree is the proxy for the daydream massah being bludgeoned and killed.

A news report tells of black radicals killing whites. To the screaming sound of electric guitars, Jacopetti and Prosperi cut to a slow-motion scene of Black Pan-

ther types with huge Afros slaughtering a white suburban family with axes. They smash their kitchen as flour bags and ketchup bottles burst in the air.

Back at the beach, a blonde white girl frolics with an empty-headed white man as the minister reads of Nat killing the white girl he grew up with. "I had to kill her . . . because I loved her . . . because she was white. . . ." This stupid whitey asks the minister to take a snapshot of him with his girl. Surprising even himself, the minister complies.

A little white boy's beach ball rolls up to the minister, whose expression fills with angst. He squeezes the ball, tighter and tighter, as his face fills the screen, beaded with sweat. The blaring rock music on the soundtrack grows unbearably loud. The ball explodes in a final fit of release, the minister smiles in freeze-frame, and the credits roll to Riz Ortolani's cheery fife-and-drum theme song.

*Farewell Uncle Tom* is one of the most extreme and offensive films ever produced, executed in a twisted mimic of the Jodorowsky-Arrabal Panic Theater style of surrealism. The racial situations and talk, the photographed abuse of people and children, go way beyond the pale. In their inimitable way, Prosperi and Jacopetti have documented *their own* crimes against humanity by their imaginary reproduction of one of America's most shameful historical episodes.



On the other hand, you've got to hand it to the macaroni duo. *Uncle Tom* is 137 minutes with scant moments of boredom. The ending—an idiot savant's version of art filmmaking—is the only appropriate capper to the lunacy you've just witnessed. It's the oily snicker of two Italians who are chuckling at America's race problems in that too-true, *Mondo Cane,* people-are-rotten way. Was the film made as an anti-American cartoon for international distribution? Was it a double-edged attempt by Prosperi and Jacopetti to cash in on both angry American blacks and cracker bigots? Ka-ching!

The movie remains Jacopetti and Prosperi's most spectacular and expensive venture, and the most bizarre use of the Mondo format. After making the film, Jacopetti explained that he didn't think that blacks were inferior; they were just *less evolved,* as he put it. And he passionately denied being a racist. "How could I be? I have a black son"—a young Haitian lad he "adopted" during the shoot. The film remains banned to this day in its makers' native Italy.

The final installment of the duo's cinematic career is *Mondo Candido* (1975). Though partially filmed in Manhattan, the movie was so pornographic that it was

never even released stateside. It was Jacopetti and Prosperi's first attempt at fiction, and uses as its source material Voltaire's pessimist classic *Candide,* in which the titular protagonist is a naïve young man who wanders through wars and other disasters in a constant quest for his love, Cunegonde. Throughout his misadventures, Candide is told by his philosophical mentor, Pangloss, that "this is the best of all possible worlds."

*Mondo Candido* has a more expansive sense of spectacle than *Uncle Tom,* which was sunbaked but dank and grungy. Images emerge as epiphenomena of Jacopetti's shattered mind, reflections of a terminally jaded man who's seen and done it all—and then some. Like Candide walking through time, it's as if he wanted to recreate history through his films. *Mondo Candido* is Jacopetti's *8½.*

Unfortunately, the film is pretty incoherent, and its strongest points are its opulent kinky fantasy scenes. The focus on sadomasochism, encompassing everything from spanking to medieval bondage, is the surprise kicker here. Jacopetti and Prosperi demonstrate that they're capable of creating S&M imagery with as much flair, exaggeration, and intensity as they'd fashioned the racial and sexual caricatures of *Uncle Tom.*

An elaborate inquisition torture chamber sequence stands out. People are stretched on racks and tortured in presses; girls are in stocks and cages; nude women wearing white nun's headdresses have leaves placed over their genitals and are dropped, one by one, into a giant meat grinder. Others are placed in burlap sacks and cats are tossed in with them; the movie shows them squirming in the sacks as if they're dancing to the acid rock blaring on the soundtrack. More nuns are placed in a long line and violated by a huge rotating pole that's placed between their legs.

Escaping the torture chamber, Candide saves the life of a Mocombo, a black guy whom the inquisitors are choking to death by his neck chain. As in *Uncle Tom,* Jacopetti again presents the coal-black Negro with a smile as broad as the Ivory Coast, part Man Friday and part sexual receptacle. Mocombo falls to his knees in gratitude after his rescue, beaming as Candide's dick waves in front of his face.

*Mondo Candido* refers to *Women of the World* in its fetishistic look at an all-female military society. Groups of uniformed Israeli army gals march, run, and exercise, wearing shorts sets, sometimes brandishing guns. Arabs peek at them through binoculars. A huge gunfight erupts, with the Arabs shooting women in

sickening eroto-snuff slow motion. Candide then scampers back to the castle that started the film. Roll credits.

By the time he was wrapping up *Mondo Candido,* Jacopetti's was growing depressed at how television was turning the Mondo movies and his swingin' photojournalist image into anachronisms. After all, by the mid-1970s, the nightly news had grown as nasty as his films. Frustrated throughout the shoot that the budget didn't permit his usual global sex vacations, Jacopetti left Prosperi to complete the film. Repressed hostility between the two partners finally erupted, and by the end of filming, they'd stopped speaking to each other.

At the height of his career in the mid-1960s, Jacopetti told journalists that he was an apostle of violence, claiming that the misanthropy expressed in *Mondo Cane* was his personal philosophy. By the time he was promoting *Mondo Candido* in the mid-1970s, Jacopetti gave the practiced pose of a world-weary pessimist who had egomaniacally vaulted himself through filmmaking to the aesthetic heights of Voltaire. But there was no controversial movie to back it up, only fragments of sex fantasies and self-referential narcissism—without an audience that cared.



By 1976, the Mondo genre had gone into semi-hibernation. Rolf Olsen's *Journey Into the Beyond* featured narration by John Carradine and the charming device of chimes on the soundtrack to warn of any disgusting footage about to appear. The height of repulsion here was Filipino "psychic surgery," in which hands knead flesh and rip bloody shoelaces (supposedly fatal tumors) out of "miraculously" self-healing wounds.



The *Mondo America* series (aka *Jabberwalk I* and *Jabberwalk II*) had an erratic release pattern beginning in 1976; the films eventually turned up on the Deuce in 1979. Made by Italians but shot domestically the films focused on the burgeoning U.S. sex industry---complete with cameos by ubiquitous big-name porn performers like Vanessa Del Rio and Ron Jeremy—and were pretty light, generally fun fare when compared to the blood and guts of other Mondo entries. They included visits to a dildo factory, a peek into a legal Nevada brothel, and trips to dominance houses featuring lots of elaborate equipment and fat, ugly men utilizing it. *Mondo America's* highlight was topless female mud wrestling, a new misogynist kink in the mid-1970s that's since become the standard fare of second-string men's magazines. The films made a comeback a decade later on a double

bill with *Sex and Violence* at the Roxy video grindhouse, where the blasting air conditioning froze the audience solid.

In 1977, Alfredo and Angelo Castiglioni's *Mondo Magic* had a brief run at the Loew's Victoria Theater on 46th Street and Broadway, a large, well-maintained house that was unfortunately among the first old Times Square theaters to close. One of the bloodiest and most severe pictures of its genre, *Mondo Magic* made even its own distributors, Carl Peppercorn and Irving Worsmer, want to vomit. The X-rated film's ad campaign featured a fakir with hooks in his back poised as a human seesaw.

The perfect film to see in the front row of a packed Times Square theater with an audience stoned out of its mind, *Mondo Magic* opens with a hypnotic sequence of Africans getting off a boat. It looks as if nothing has changed from the last century. Opiated music, minimal nature shots, and cryptic narration written by Alberto Moravia tie it all together.

The film's segment on native practices starts with an African tribe that worships cattle dung and urine. Members kiss cows' asses, reach in up to the elbows, pull out some shit, and blankly stick their faces in the poor cows' asses again. Repeated slow motion shots show warriors in odd body paints and nipple rings jumping in the air in unison, their genitals flapping in the wind. Amazon holy men inhale a hallucinogenic powder, causing spasmodic movement and yammering not unlike urban drug casualties. Arguments between husbands and their wives' lovers are settled with a BOP! over the head, sending men to the ground shaking and bleeding, only to get up and do it again.

A segment on medicine features the standard Filipino hand surgery, along with an Arab folk clinic that functions more like a torture chamber. Not even tots are safe from the filmmakers' prying eye when little girls' palates are partially cut out of their mouths and placed on their heads. Incisions are made in men's eyebrows with razors to drain out bad humors.

Later segments beat out the original *Mondo Cane* in their graphic portrayal of self-mutilation. Filipino penitents beat themselves bloody in reenactments of Christ's crucifixion. African warriors, stoned on hash, laugh out loud as they're brutally caned in a test of strength. As the film's high point, the requisite Indian fakir scene features the human seesaw shown in the ad campaign.

The sex magick section contains views of actual intercourse, although meat

shots are discreetly avoided. Pages of the Koran are placed on an Arab couple attempting to conceive a child. The audience collapsed in stitches when frowning African men with faces like scowling voodoo dolls simulate sexual positions for understandably confused children: Mops on heads indicate femininity, brooms between legs are phalluses, legs raised in the air symbolize the sex act. *Mondo Magic*'s conclusion takes place at an African convent in which the women masturbate with a wooden dildo after the priest deflowers them.

Despite the extreme subject matter, the film is far more humanistic than one would expect and has the dreamy feel of a meditation, not a geek show. The subjects look almost shy when photographed. There's no filler. In its marriage of thoughtfulness and broken taboos, *Mondo Magic* remains the genre's masterpiece. As one of the more bizarre religious tracts quoted in the movie states: "Drops of blood fell on the moon. Every drop became a man." Drops of blood fell on some film and it was called *Mondo Magic.*



The Mondo flame continued to flicker faintly on the Deuce with *Savage Man, Savage Beast* (1975; Deuce release 1981). Antonio Climati, the cinematographer responsible for the lush look of Jacopetti's productions, was now in the director's seat. Unfortunately, the only real and revolting sequences were used in the film's trailer, which showed cannibalized bodies, a tourist being ripped apart by lions during a nature-park drive, and, most appallingly, mercenaries mutilating and castrating the bodies of South American Indians they'd killed. *Savage Man, Savage Beast* was like a dull but violent *Wild Kingdom* episode: No matter how beautifully photographed, its endless shots of monkeys scampering quickly become boring. Famed novelist Alberto Moravia provides narration that's too oblique and literate for the false piety of the film.

In the late 1970s, the final and grossest spinoff of the Mondo series, the *Faces of Death* films, got things going again. For weeks prior to the premiere of the first installment, trailers teased Deuce audiences with promises of something truly sickening and terrifying. After the big buildup, however, the audience at the Times Square Theater was bored to tears by the actual movie. You could hear a pin drop in the theater. People were waiting to *feel* something.

Blatantly snuff-driven, *Faces of Death* (1978) shows the deaths of humans and animals via accidents, executions, and murder. It possesses a modicum of

shock value—such as footage of a slaughterhouse, the L.A. County morgue, and a blurry news videotape sequence showing mutilated airplane crash victims—but *Faces of Death* is bogus, relying on flimsy dramatizations of men meeting their ends in gas chambers and electric chairs. The film inevitably invites comparisons with serious cinematic meditations on death, such as Stan Brakhage's autopsy documentary *The Act of Seeing With One's Own Eyes* and the Belgian documentary *Des Mortes*, which records customs of death and burial around the globe. Despite its inherent inhumanity, *Faces of Death* proved a lumberingly paced mediocrity recommendable only to Mondo completists.

Eventually *Faces of Death* joined *Savage Man, Savage Beast* on a triple header with *Brutes and Savages* (1978). One of the dullest Mondo movies, *Brutes* is hosted by a British explorer with a Prince Valiant hairdo. As he makes his way through various parts of South America, there are too few unintentional laughs, and the movie's highlight brain surgery sequence is set to Muzak. The Times Square crowd stared blankly and fell asleep.

In 1984, however, *Shocking Asia* rattled the audience from its slumbers and effectively revived the Mondo movie on 42nd Street. While it featured the usual faux (though still nauseating) Filipino hand surgery and fakir antics, the film ventured into gendertwist mayhem of the most shocking variety. Its centerpiece is a simultaneously sickening and jawdropping sequence of transsexual hookers on the stroll—one of whom undergoes an actual male-to-female sex change. When you see the tranny's fucked-out asshole on the operating table, you just *know* it's better that he's getting a new orifice. The scene pulverized the Deuce audience into a sea of groans, leaving them shaking their heads and mumbling the name of the film as they wandered down the street later in the evening, bewildered. After *Shocking Asia*'s marathon run, *Mondo Magic* became a Deuce classic under a new title, *Shocking Cannibals*.

What became of the genre's fathers, Jacopetti and Prosperi? In 1980 Jacopetti got a consulting job for a newly created TV station and stated that he was prepared to take a slightly more optimistic outlook on life. Since then, he's maintained a staunch silence with journalists, claiming that he does not like to talk about the past. *Uncle Tom* is still banned in Italy, but you can see *Africa Addio* on evening TV. Gualtiero Jacopetti held on to the rights of his films, and lives quietly

in Rome. In early 2001 he recovered successfully from yet another operation on the arm he injured in the car accident that cost Belinda Lee her life. He then was off to London to visit one of the daughters who still spoke to him.

When his association with Jacopetti dissolved, Franco Prosperi made *The Wild Beasts,* which was produced by his son, Federico. The film captures Prosperi's amazingly kinetic abilities in a horror-thriller realm. Although driven by a conventional narrative, *The Wild Beasts* is rooted in the Mondo universe of bad taste, animal abuse, the endangerment of cast members and bystanders alike, and shocks that turn into unintentional laughs. The film would have packed the house at the Times Square, but, like *Mondo Candido,* it was never released stateside. Today, it's found a following on home video.

Prosperi has been MIA in the movie industry for some time. In Rome, however, a man named Franco Prosperi breeds and sells Maltese dogs with movie star names like "The Steve McQueen" and "The Claudia Cardinale" through a company called Cinecitta Maltese. This man denies that he ever made Mondo films.

# eight

# The Liberty and the Cinerama: Showcases for Eurosleaze

**The Liberty was roughly trampled but surprisingly still friendly. The concession** stand stood right before the auditorium doors, giving the lobby an odor of hot dogs, Pine-Sol, and knishes. The bathrooms, down a flight of stairs adjacent to the hot dogs, were safer and better patrolled than those in other Deuce grindhouses. The Liberty tried hard to keep up appearances and did its best to provide a comfortable viewing experience, keeping its seats relatively well upholstered. During the early 1980s, the theater often used a promotional device unique to Deuce grindhouses: a TV set behind plexiglass at the entrance to the lobby that played trailers to lure ticket buyers off the street. This bit of enticing promotion also permitted the Liberty to charge $4 to $5 on opening night. When a much-anticipated movie would open, the theater drew capacity crowds.

The Liberty specialized in intensely erotic and violent movies from across Europe, which lent it a distinct status on the Deuce. The content of these films was so graphic that they often wouldn't be distributed to theaters in the rest of New York City, effectively making the Liberty their exclusive showcase. The films fell mostly into a handful of categories: Eurosex movies, violent thrillers known as giallos, cannibal vomitoriums, and zombie rip-offs.

Eurosex movies proved to be enduring Deuce replays, and the king of the Deuce Eurosex movie was and is Jess Franco, Europe's most prolific exploitation director. To date, he's made literally hundreds of films in the horror, thriller, period piece, and women's prison genres, and his work has always had a relentless fetishistic slant. Franco's movies are a hodgepodge of quickly tossed-off pornogra-

Old, naked, and alone, the Liberty and the Empire just before the wrecking ball. (Photo Michelle Clifford)



phy, American pulp fiction influences, and sadomasochistic iconography. Yet his background as a jazz musician has lent him the ability to meld these disparate elements into a satisfying composition.

One of Franco's main strengths is his wife and leading lady for three decades, Lina Romay. Jess hooked up with Lina on a movie set in the early 1970s after his previous leading lady, Soledad Miranda, died in a car crash. Jess felt that Lina was the "reincarnation" of Soledad—or at least an apt replacement. When they first met, Lina was a teenager and Jess was middle-aged, a disparity that has placed them eternally in a father-daughter S&M dynamic. Decades later, Lina's still happily playing out daddy Jess's manias.

When Jess Franco shows up to make movies, he's there to get down to business and Lina is there to flesh it out. She's been nude; she's been beaten with a riding crop while tied on a metal bed frame; she's given head to a man and woman tied back to back; she's run naked with Cuban heels through bramble, cutting her ass and legs in the process; and she's been raped in a number of debasing ways.

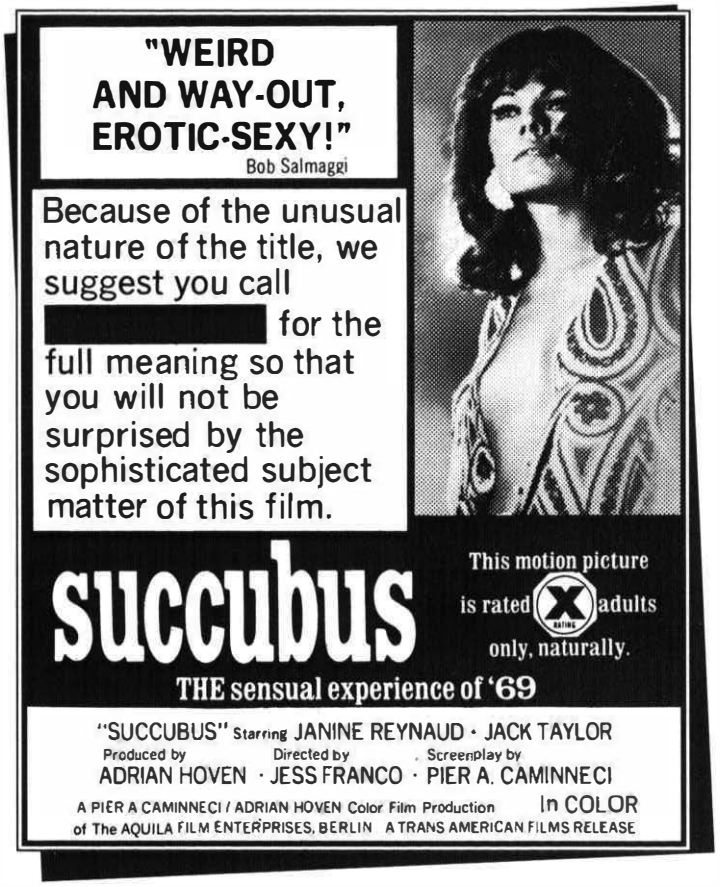
Lina's done it all, yet she doesn't complain. She's also been on the other side of the camera, making her own perverted movies.

Franco has a floating stock company of Americans like Jack Palance or Mercedes McCambridge, who were driven to working abroad after their domestic careers sagged; actors like Akim Tamiroff and Dennis Price, once highly regarded but desperate and on their last legs by the time they encountered Franco; eccentric European character types like Howard Vernon (who played the evil scientist behind *Alphaville*'s omnipotent computer); and international showbiz knockabouts like Jack Taylor. Franco has an astute way of casting these diverse individuals in the most effective ways possible. He also has a very special talent for bringing out the erotic intensity inherent in his actresses, placing Lina Romay in physically distressful situations that require strenuous self-defense and pairing her with complimentary older dominant women like Alice Arno. Alice was one of the brightest Eurosex stars, and Franco had developed her out of a body-double girl at Eurocine Studios. This Euro-circuit ensemble has wound up receiving their greatest recognition and acclaim across the Atlantic from appreciative Deuce audiences.

Some of Franco fans believe he is a genius, citing as proof has brief association with Orson Welles in making the penny-dreadful Shakespeare adaptation *Chimes at Midnight* in the mid-1960s. One can more realistically see Franco as a talented, imaginative filmmaker who is self-aware enough to know he functions best in exploitation modes. The act of making a women's prison--or S&M-oriented film, especially one that places his wife in different erotic situations, fulfills his manias. He can be slick and velour in his approach to sadomasochism, or he can be as lowdown and smutty as Joe Davian's no-budget hardcore women's prison movies like *Domination Blue,* which played a few blocks north of the Deuce at the Avon 7 adult theater.

Franco introduced himself to Deuce audiences in 1969 with the trailblazing women's prison film *99 Women* and the pseudo-sophisticated *Succubus.* The MPAA ratings system had just been created, and both films were among the first to be awarded X tags. *Women* was a hit because it stuck to the basic template of the women's prison movie: an evil warden (played by Herbert Lom), a whipping scene, lesbianism, and a dash more nudity than domestic films supplied.

*Succubus* was a psychedelic piece of fluff for the over-forty set, telling the


"WEIRD AND WAY-OUT, EROTIC-SEXY!"
Bob Salmaggi
Because of the unusual nature of the title, we suggest you call [redacted] for the full meaning so that you will not be surprised by the sophisticated subject matter of this film.
succubus
This motion picture is rated X adults only, naturally.
THE sensual experience of '69
"SUCCUBUS" Starring JANINE REYNAUD · JACK TAYLOR
Produced by ADRIAN HOVEN · Directed by JESS FRANCO · Screenplay by PIER A. CAMINNECI
A PIER A CAMINNECI / ADRIAN HOVEN Color Film Production of The AQUILA FILM ENTERPRISES, BERLIN
In COLOR
A TRANS AMERICAN FILMS RELEASE

Jess Franco's 1969 U.S. breakthrough crowned him as king of Eurosleaze. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)

story of a nightclub performer who loses her grip on reality. The movie makes little narrative sense, but is framed by a tremendously intense S&M stage show in which the heroine tortures a man and a woman who are both tied to X-crosses. Its star, Janine Reynaud, is the archetypal busty older woman with a sensuous scowl, a Gallic Dyanne Thorne parading around nude or in post-mod Karl Lagerfeld designer threads. The film includes such late 1960s touches as an LSD orgy with a midget serving sugar cubes, lesbian seductions, and hallucinations of mannequins coming alive. *Succubus* benefited enormously at the box office from its stylish ad campaign, which was designed and funded by the film's producer, Pier A. Caminneci, who was enamored of Reynaud.

In 1976, Deuce-based distributor Aquarius Releasing opened Franco's

women's prison movie *Barbed Wire Dolls* at the Liberty with a poster that looked like the cover of a bondage paperback. Along with his *Ilsa* spinoff *Wanda, the Wicked Warden,* the film was to become his most popular. The director is at his most Tijuanaesque here, showcasing Lina with all the finesse of a seedy Mexican hissing, "Hey Meester Yankee, you wanna see some hot pictures? That girl's *reeel* hot! I should know—she's my wife!"

*Barbed Wire Dolls* opens with Nestor, the head guard, starving and brutalizing a half-crazed nude female prisoner. Nestor is a personification of the entire film. His exaggerated acting style is straight out of a *Peliculas* episode and his voice—dubbed by a black man—is hilariously inappropriate, and provoked the Liberty audience to gales of laughter and shouts of "He's got a brother's voice and a woman's tits!" as numerous big, looming close-ups of Nestor's grinning face filled the Liberty's screen.

The credits, which roll over a tropical setting surrounding a remote prison, claim falsely that *Black Mama, White Mama* star Margaret Markov, billed as "Peggy Markov," is among the cast members. Instead, Franco's tightwad Swiss producer Erwin Dietrich supplies a blonde Euro-facsimile of the American exploitation star.

The movie riffs on the women's prison theme in the raunchiest manner possible, aided by a zoom lens that makes Paul Morrisey's work in early Warhol productions look controlled. The sets are believably unsanitary looking. Much of the supporting cast members are so grizzled they're hard to enjoy, which has the effect of playing up the distinctive looks of the lead actresses. The pristine quality of "Markov" is played against Monica Swinn's outrageously sadistic wardeness. Swinn gives it her all, donning an Erich von Stroheim monocle under slicked back hair, carrying a riding crop, and packing herself into the shortest black hot pants ever seen in a women's prison flick.

Naturally, the main focus of *Barbed Wire Dolls* is Lina Romay, who cannily downplays her performance to contrast it sharply with the almost hysterical exaggerations of the other cast members. In a hilarious flashback sequence, she's sleeping in the nude and her perverted father (played by hubbie Jess) sneaks up on her. She clouts him over the head and flees in slow motion—but it's the actors who are moving slo-mo, not the photography, which gives a very odd effect.

Franco's vulgarity in *Barbed Wire Dolls* knows no limits. The film's center-

piece is the notorious electroshock scenes with Lina. She's strapped to a metal bed frame by Nestor. A roar of a generator is heard. The screen goes black, then is filled with Lina's screaming face. Lurid pans over her naked body reveal bedpans placed under her crotch. After one session where Nestor torments her with a riding crop, there's a reference to a "punctured bowel."

*Barbed Wire Dolls* is filled with explicit sequences that border on hardcore, including split-beaver shots of female masturbation (in one depraved instance with a lit cigarette). Swinn rims Markov; Nestor has his raw way with the inmates. After an elderly prison doctor (Howard Vernon) injects Lina with a gargantuan set of works, he lays his naked gooseflesh atop her. Franco zooms to the crucifix hanging on the wall above them.

The film comes to an appropriately grim conclusion. Lina and a few cohorts escape, the camera panning up the women's smocks while they climb down the prison wall. Nestor and a female guard dash through the jungle in hot pursuit. The tropical sun becomes too much for Nestor's distaff companion, who's moved to run around topless in army pants, holding a machine gun. Lina makes it to the governor's office, only to discover he's in cahoots with the warden and the doctor. She's shot and falls down dead as Howard Vernon's doc smirks and taps a few ominous chords on the piano.







*Barbed Wire Dolls* is a classic. It's the director's own perverted, impassioned cinema verité document of his daily job: framing his wife in torture tableaux. It established Franco as the boldest auteur to attack the tired women's prison genre, adding many new perverse shadings to a well-worn genre.

While Jess Franco used multiple pseudonyms that nevertheless remain easily recognizable as his, no one ever really knew who made the sadomasochistic classic *Slaves in Cages* (1974), which only adds to its mystique. The film is one of the most primal, infamous, and enduring early Eurosex classics, and instantly became an integral part of 42nd Street when it ran at the Liberty. After you'd seen it, you could run into the tiny, fetish-oriented adult bookstore next door and purchase slick S&M movie magazines with photo spreads devoted to the film.

Throughout the 1970s, *Slaves in Cages* popped up on triple bills with like-minded cofeatures like Bob Cresse's *Love Camp 7.* Intense old men in suits with clasped briefcases—the types that would patronize Times Square B&D magazine-and-peep-booth emporiums like Kinematics—turned up like pigeons to

breadcrumbs whenever it played. It also mesmerized young, white, S&M-obsessed nerds from throughout the tristate area. Silence and occasional rustling would descend over the Liberty aisles, occasionally punctuated by the laughter of the core inner city black audience, who took the movie as a bizarre sexual comedy.

The film opens with a slightly tawdry blonde wearing a white gown, sitting in the back of a limo with a date that looks like a Bill Ward drawing: huge sideburns, pompadour, dinner jacket, white turtleneck, and enormous pendant medallion. They smile at each other and sip champagne. He keeps shooting her sinister, oily glances. The titles come up, bearing unknown Germanic names, and are a little shaky as they pass over the images. Sideburns goes down on the blonde in the back of the limo.

They arrive at his mansion. He pours more champagne, and they dance a brief waltz. Suddenly, Sideburns slaps her face. She slaps him back. He punches her in the stomach, knocking her out. Creepy jazz music plays as Sideburns fondles and undresses her limp body, getting down to her leopard-print undies. After finally removing her white gloves, he pours cold beer into a metal stein and tosses it in her face, waking her.

Sideburns brings the heroine to a cage in his dungeon. Four other nude women—robust, dark-haired, Munich stripper types—languish in other cages. Apparently all the women have shared the same experience: They went on a date with Sideburns and wound up abducted by him.

"You're insane," she blurts at him, horrified. "Crazy?" smirks Mr. Sideburns. "They say murderers aren't responsible for what they do because they're crazy. And I'm not a murderer."

Sideburns changes into dungarees and a dress shirt open to his navel. He methodically retrieves tinfoil-covered trays from his refrigerator-freezer (where they sit next to a six-pack of beer), carries them downstairs, and feeds the women like animals. This whole bitch-training ritual, with its naked, totally submissive, caged women, depicted graphically and presented as one of the highlights of the film, makes some members of the audience gasp in happy disbelief. Our blonde heroine, of course, is appalled.

Sideburns uses his slaves for private live shows that are reminiscent of *Behind the Green Door.* Men and couples turn up wearing old-fashioned domino masks, and sit in green director's chairs. The first act features a very professional

striptease to smoky saxophone music. Once the stripper is nude, another woman combs her hair. Baby oil rubdowns ensue, and two more women join them for an athletic four-way orgy.

After the performance, Sideburns sees that his new kidnap victim has finally been broken in, after being in her cage a week without food or water. He extracts her and fucks her on a chair as POV shots of her face fly back and forth toward the camera. Sideburns permits her water, but becomes furious when she fails to slurp it in a satisfactorily canine manner. He makes her lick it off her cage floor.

A fat man comes to have a private show. The show turns into a whipping party with Fats, Sideburns, and all the girls flogging the heroine in slow motion. More scenes of Sideburns sadistically balling the put-upon heroine follow, intercut with scenes of Sideburns's daily routine: narcissistically preening; walking his German shepherd; doing the backstroke in his pool (wearing flesh-colored, form-fitting trunks); pruning his garden—still in his bathing suit—as he contemplates a flower. The scenes are curious, because they look like location shots of the Hollywood hills, yet the cast and crew are foreign and unrecognizable from any American film.





Sideburns introduces the heroine to his S&M theater audience and she pulls off a showstopper, masturbating with a large dildo while being whipped by two other women. Sideburns beats a woman as she's forced to eat the heroine's pussy, then whips all the women in different physical arrangements. The worm finally turns when the women surround him and strangle him to death, to the applause of the audience.

*Slaves in Cages* makes its low-budget ethos work for itself in a brilliantly minimal way. It's a startlingly concise movie, running at just over an hour, and is blunt in its single-minded presentation of S&M, bitch training, and whippings for the voyeur's pleasure. The exaggerated looks of the cast members fit perfectly: The women look like they'd be modeling for Georges Pichard's graphic torture novels, and Sideburns has a precise sadist caricature look.

Although many hypocrites have called *Slaves in Cages* misogynist while secretly getting off on its sadism, they're missing the point. The movie is a peek into a degradation lifestyle that severe bondage enthusiasts enjoy, and accepts S&M as a routine part of heterosexual sex. When Sideburns gets the trays of food for the women, it's part of a normal day's routine. While the situation of the slaves isn't

initially voluntary, their later *Salo*-like passivity indicates an acceptance of masochism. With this attitude, the film offered emotional reassurance to closeted S&M lovers who turned up to see it.

*Slaves in Cages* is a perfect example of how Eurosleaze films are larger-than-life expansions of what dirty bookstore kink loops offer the horny viewer: a look at a situation that's difficult to act out. It's this element of erotic wish fulfillment that has kept viewers going back to *Slaves in Cages* for over two decades.

The sex scenes aren't hardcore, but rather a certain kind of very hard simulation that distinguishes Eurosex movies from domestic exploitation. There is frequent female frontal nudity, some pussy manipulation, and explicit sex scenes. Another Eurosleaze earmark is the funny dubbing: Sideburns is given a mock-ominous voice that's as cartoonish as his appearance, and the scenes of him preening are hysterically funny.

While *Slaves in Cages* plays on the weird "consent" manifested in the passivity by the masochists, other Eurosex movies are driven by flat-out, unwilling violation. *Cry Rape* (1974) is a German film about two thugs who pick up a woman in a bar, drag her to a ditch, and take turns raping her. As dawn is about to break, they tell their victim that they're done and she should just get her clothes, go home, and forget about the whole thing. She wants to go to the police. In the chilling conclusion, the two assailants logically and rationally explain how seeking help from the police will only be the next step in her brutalization. *Cry Rape* is a strange, angular movie that achieves a kind of Warholian drone, oscillating between tedium, bitter violent sex, and flashes of psychodramatic truth. The appropriately jagged and fragmentary soundtrack by the avant-garde German rock band Can enhances the film's brooding atmosphere.

In a similar vein, *The Rape Killer* (1976) was one of the most ubiquitous Greek imports to hit the Deuce. Since the 1960s, Hellenic exploitation efforts like *The Fear* (1967) and *The Girl Can't Stop* (1966) had been obsessed with rape and its violent aftermath. In *The Rape Killer,* a demented man kidnaps women, shoots them up with heroin, keeps them in coffins, and rapes them whenever he feels up to it. What's overwhelming about the movie is not only its shameless approach to the totally distasteful, but its thudding dubbing. Punches, yells, and blows are amplified to such deafening levels that audiences just can't take it seriously after a while, and start laughing even at the most brutal moments.

Eurosex violation epics spawned their own stars. Sirpa Lane, a woman of striking beauty and uncanny cool, handled some of the heaviest lead roles in Eurosex movies. She was the lead in Roger Vadim's art house terminal sex opus *Charlotte* (1974) and starred in one of the Deuce's most notorious Nazi love camp movies, *Love Camp 27* (1976). Walk into any Deuce grindhouse in the mid-1970s and Sirpa's image appeared in the ubiquitously shown *Love Camp* trailer, itself a shocking exploitation classic, refracting a repellent yet curiously compelling movie centered on torture, violation, and borderline hardcore sex. The voice of a drive-in owner announces that the scenes you're about to see have been cut to protect any children in the audience, with the buzzword "children" used as a sick attention getter. Women are stripped. The screen goes into a blue card reading "CUT," although the action has already been shown. Nazis whipping girls. CUT. A German shepherd chasing Sirpa through an apartment. CUT. Bloody nude females. CUT. Whipping. CUT. The plot of *Love Camp 27* deals with Sirpa as a Jewish girl who escapes a death camp by running a Nazi brothel. With appalling scenes like a rape with a bullhorn, *Love Camp 27* became a predecessor to the most twisted Euro Nazi sexploitation movies. It's only watchable because of Sirpa's beguiling looks and incredible charisma.



Another infamous bit of Nazi degeneracy, this time emanating from Italy, was *Salon Kitty* (1976; Deuce release 1978). The film was doubly shocking considering it was released through the auspices of the relatively mainstream American International Pictures. It was booked on the Deuce on an appropriate double bill with the brutal *The Rape Squad* (1974), a film about a stocking-masked creep forcing women to play infantile games before assaulting them, and before their ultimate revenge. *Salon Kitty* cashed in on the reputation of Visconti's *The Damned,* using one of its stars, Helmut Berger. Here, Berger plays the head of a Nazi brothel that bugs the rooms so that conspiracies among the SS men can be detected. We're taken on a tour of perversions early in the movie, with Berger showing off different rooms for different sex activities. One displays a girl-and-dwarf arrangement. Present in the orgies is Teresa Ann Savoy, a specialist in twisted Eurosex roles like the sexually active and mentally retarded protagonist of the tasteless *Bambina.* The movie ends with a totally nude Berger doing a *sieg heil* as he's shot dead. *Salon Kitty* was directed by Italian pornographer Tinto Brass, who also made the Audubon interracial release *Black on White* and later

directed most of Bob Guccione's *Caligula.* Unlike *Love Camp 27, Salon Kitty*'s run on the Deuce was brief, and it had the distinction of being one of the few Eurosex movies to reduce a packed house to shocked silence.

At the other end of the Eurosex spectrum, the mini-genre of Amazon films that were tossed around the Deuce catered to the masochistic male thirst to see women on top. *Warrior Queen* (1973) appealed to catfight fans by presenting nude women wrestling, but the Deuce's favorite movie in this realm had to be *Battle of the Amazons* (1973). The original Italian version of the film contained a great deal of bloody battles, dismemberments, and impalings, but in order to avoid the restrictive X rating for violence, distributor American International Pictures cannily recut the movie, playing up its kinky highlights within a concise running time.

*Battle of the Amazons* brings to life the male fantasy of an all-female society of sturdy women devoted to subjugating men. While this situation leads to some lesbian interplay, some Amazons also lust for the opposite sex, which propels the dramatic conflicts. The film's display of tough, sexy women—all clad in leather headbands, short toga-like outfits, and revealing, oft-removed tops—has held sway over voyeurs since its initial release. Many scenes show off the Amazons preening, practicing battle moves, or menacing men with whips.

The movie has a classic whipping scene, one that became legendary among aficionados of sadism in the movies. The hero is sent to the Amazon slave camp but manages to escape when he places a scorpion behind a blonde, whip-wielding overseer's neck. She gets stung and he makes a run for it. A fellow Amazon must suck the poison out. The Amazon queen makes an example of the unlucky bitten overseer, tying her to a whipping post in front of a crowd of Amazons and slaves and taking her top down. To add to her humiliation, one of the male slaves is ordered to do the whipping. The scene excites the Amazon queen so much that she foregoes giving the overseer ten more lashes to cop a fast feel while her charge is still bound.

The production values are adequate but cheesy. *Battle of the Amazons* is a silly, entertaining tease, the 70s equivalent of the Italian sword-and-sandals movies from the early 60s, but with an all-girl army. Inner city actionrama devotees found the female battle scenes a unique wrinkle, while the fetishists sat there hypnotized by the whole spectacle. *Battle of the Amazons* works well be-

cause it was edited down to a brisk pace and the bloodshed that distracted from the eroticism has been removed.

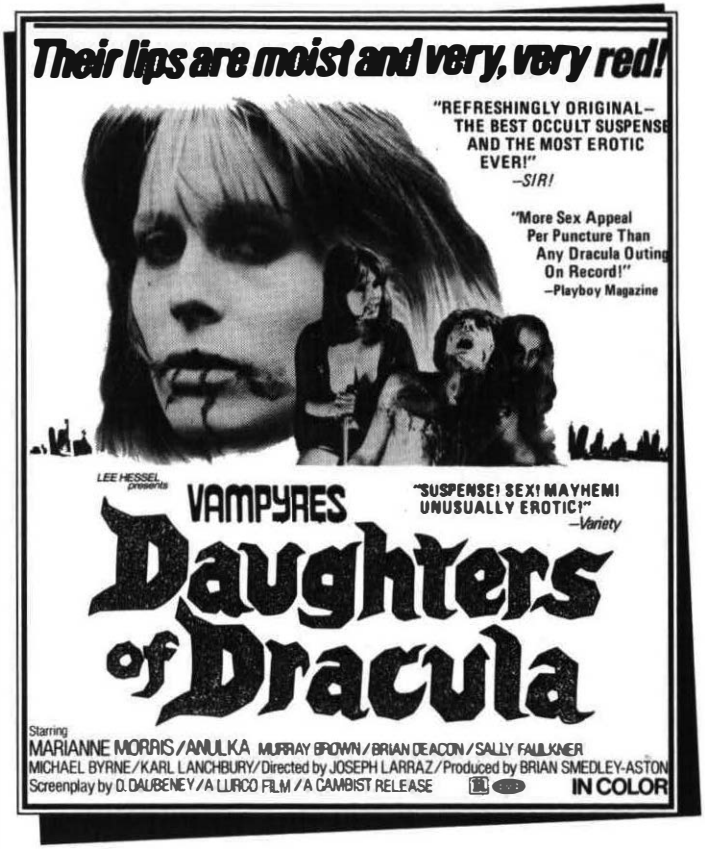
Fantasy Eurosex enthusiasts enjoyed *The Perils of Gwendoline* (1984) so much that some turned up each night of its four-day Dence run. Directed by Just Jaeckin, a former fashion photographer who had done well in the class-X market with *Emmanuelle* and *The Story of O, Gwendoline* was a *Barbarella*-like adaptation of John Willie's beloved bondage cartoon *Sweet Gwendoline.* It doesn't matter that Tawny Kitaen isn't the willowy blonde of the comic strip, or that the movie isn't precisely faithful to its source, because *Gwendoline* is nonstop fetish fun from start to finish, complete with chariot races drawn by pony girls, an underground kingdom of women ruled by an evil queen, girls clad in black shorts with pony haircuts sweating and working in a diamond mine, and an incredible dungeon scene. Women are dunked upside down in water, spun on wheels, and menaced with crossbows that activate if they speak. Tawny and her costars are extremely likeable, and the movie is lushly and invitingly produced.



If you were on a date, and wanted something a little spooky and sexy, you'd walk five blocks north of the Liberty to Broadway and 47th Street and pay about $1.50 more for a ticket to the upscale grindhouse, the Cinerama. The slightly more expensive admission kept out Deuce riffraff and attracted a crowd that wasn't out to hassle anyone. Throughout the 1970s, the Cinerama showed exploitation classics like *The Big Doll House* and date movies like the oft-revived, 3-D *House of Wax.*



Although it had been cut in half to be twinned, the Cinerama lost none of its grace and beauty. The Cinerama 1 had been the auditorium, a large one-level affair, and the Cinerama 2 upstairs had previously been the balcony. The Cinerama 2 had soft, cozy red seats and a Roman Coliseum theme, enshrouding viewers in dreamy, relaxed darkness as they sat enraptured by the movie playing on the large, looming screen. This atmosphere made the Cinerama 2 an appropriate showcase for *Vampyres: Daughters of Dracula* (1974), a popular Eurosex offering from the consistently daring distributor Cambist Films, which also handled high-profile hits like the *Ilsa* movies (see chapter 9). The movie had a terrific, explicit TV spot that some night owls still recall seeing on late-night television, promising a blend of graphic softcore sex and horror that the movie more than delivered—it's the ultimate aggressive Eurosex movie, with terminal sex central to its mix.


Their lips are moist and very, very red!
"REFRESHINGLY ORIGINAL— THE BEST OCCULT SUSPENSE AND THE MOST EROTIC EVER!" —SIR!
"More Sex Appeal Per Puncture Than Any Dracula Outing On Record!" —Playboy Magazine
LEE HESSEL presents
VAMPYRES
"SUSPENSE! SEX! MAYHEM! UNUSUALLY EROTIC!" —Variety
Daughters of Dracula
Starring
MARIANNE MORRIS / ANULKA MURRAY BROWN / BRIAN DEACON / SALLY FAULKNER
MICHAEL BYRNE / KARL LANCHBURY / Directed by JOSEPH LARRAZ / Produced by BRIAN SMEDLEY-ASTON
Screenplay by D. DAUBENEY / A LLURCO FILM / A CAMBIST RELEASE
IN COLOR

Exploitation daredevil Lee Hessel's Cambist provides a campaign that's almost as explicit as the movie; the R rating is a beard. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)

Publicity through *Playboy* helped, since one of the stars (Anulka Dziubinska) had been a British import centerfold.

Cambist originally released the film with a self-imposed adults-only X tag, a unique flag of explicitness for a horror film. As with the raunchy private eye parody *Cry Uncle!*, Cambist always managed to get movies with an "adults only" tag much wider distribution than other exploitation companies. *Vampyres* subsequently bore an R rating, permitting wider play, but the film's graphic content and the self-created typographic style of the "R" on the ad matte led you to believe that the rating was fake. (Phony R-ratings, some looking slightly distorted and missing MPAA seals, was a tactic used by the nerviest exploitation distributors.)

*Vampyres* is the story of two vampire girls who attract men who don't mind dying for the sake of a good time. It opens with two nude females being shot to death, their bloody corpses falling together on a bed. It's either a flashback or flash-forward; you're never quite certain. Cut to the protagonist, Ted, a lacquered businessman (Murray Brown), checking into a remote hotel. Ted seems defensive, as if hiding a sexual secret. Ted picks up Fran (Marianne Morris), one of two caped women he had previously glimpsed hitchhiking. Fran exudes a quietly violent kink. She brings him back to her isolated old mansion, where she feeds him red wine and then spends the night with him, having intense sex. When Ted wakes up the next morning, Fran is gone, but there's a slash on his arm and blood on the sheets. Curiously, he doesn't seem concerned.

Fran shares an amorous bath with her vampire companion, Miriam (Dziubinska). Miriam tells Fran to kill Ted, but Fran is happy to have met a man content to have his blood drained slowly. He's a rarity in her world of terminal one-night stands. Like an exsanguination version of Tennessee Williams's *Desire and the Black Masseur*, where the protagonist gets increasingly damaged with each treatment, Ted keeps returning to Fran anyway.



*Vampyres* is atmospheric and erotic. The movie's muffled quality makes it perversely cozy. It's perfectly cast. Murray Brown's middle-aged pastiness works as Ted, and Dziubinska and Morris give well-controlled performances as the vampires looking as striking in capes as they do out of them, naked. Spanish director José Larraz can appreciate a truly British atmosphere: The look of *Vampyres* is cathedral brown, and everything looks sturdy, lived in, and has passed the test of time. The castle setting is an opulent and visually compelling vampires' lair, which belies the film's low budget.

One of the brightest stars of Eurosleaze directors, former fashion photographer Larraz lives up to his notoriety by pushing the sex and violence to graphic extremes. Like the best pornographers, Larraz uses the explicit scenes to advance the narrative. He shows the passion behind terminal sex, as the vampires' prey go willingly to their ends. *Vampyres* is a Eurosleaze classic, bringing an old gothic myth to life with a heartfelt sexual prurience.

In the wake of *I Am Curious (Yellow)*, 1967, exploitation distributors capitalized on the audience belief that anything with a Scandinavian girl would be raunchy fun. Cambist cashed in by releasing glossy and explicit Danish imports

like *Relations* (1970), the tale of an old man pining after a young girl; *1001 Danish Delights* (1971), with its physically strenuous horseback sex scene; and a movie called *Bordello* (1971). *Bordello* had little to do with its title subject but managed to hint at everything taboo—from young stuff to animals—in a subliminal-suggestion, flashcard way, without showing anything but stealthily normal sex.

Eurosex movies have been among the few to tackle the question of human sexual relations with our four-legged friends. Walerian Borowcyzk had a major art house hit with *Immoral Tales* (1974; New York opening 1976), a collection of four sexually explicit stories that stormed through New York with a provocative ad campaign: a picture of a costumed Paloma Picasso (Pablo's daughter) presiding over nude girls, accompanied by the tag line "You don't have to go to a museum to see an X-rated Picasso." In the film's most infamous segment, Paloma plays Countess Bathory, who gathers a bunch of gorgeous virgins to bathe in their blood.

Borowcyzk expanded what was to be the fifth tale into a feature-length film called *La Bête*. A truly sexually revolutionary movie, *La Bête* had a miraculous two-week run at the Cinerama in 1977, cashing in on *Immoral Tales'* success and also to slyly fill the market left by the prohibition of hardcore features like *Animal Lover* (1974), which had ventured into the same terrain only to be busted on obscenity charges by New York City police.

*La Bête* opens with a bearded man passionately watching horses fuck in the stable of his estate. A woman arrives with her mother, driving a Rolls. It's a pre-arranged marriage with another member of an aristocratic European family. But after the man gets shaved and bathed, the bestial nature in him starts exploding. He practically has an epileptic fit when he meets his bride-to-be at dinner, like a morphine addict having acute withdrawal. Adding to this pressure, the family is having difficulty finding a priest to sanction the union, despite the offer of a healthy tithe.

The heroine smells the criminal on the hero, and he's just what she's instinctively drawn to. As he thrashes about in his sleep, she masturbates and reads a bawdy manuscript by Voltaire, which she'd found hidden behind a leaf collection book that had belonged to the hero's ancestor (Sirpa Lane). The family proudly has her corset on display in a glass case. Among the pages of the leaf book, the heroine also discovers pictures of animal-like creatures fucking women.

A startling flashback explains what had happened to her future husband's an-

cestor. In a perverse *Little Red Riding Hood* fashion, she goes out with her frilly dress and powdered white wig. A huge creature resembling a hairy man with a fox's head chases her through the woods. The beast kills and eats a lamb before trapping and deflowering her. But then off comes her wig, her corset goes flying in the river after her bloody underpants, and she begins to exhaust the beast by fucking him every way possible, using her hands, feet, anything. Eventually he dies from exertion and she covers his body in leaves, running naked back to the estate.

You then realize why his family was so anxious to marry the hero off: His genetic makeup could kill him at any time. And in fact, he's found dead the following morning, leaving the heroine hysterical with grief. We find that he'd been hiding a tail, and a bandage over his hand was obscuring a claw. As romantic as it is graphic, *La Bête* is a parable about the animal nature within each man. Ultimately, in a resolutely tenderloin way, the movie demonstrates that sex is sex, and what's distasteful is really in the eye of the beholder.

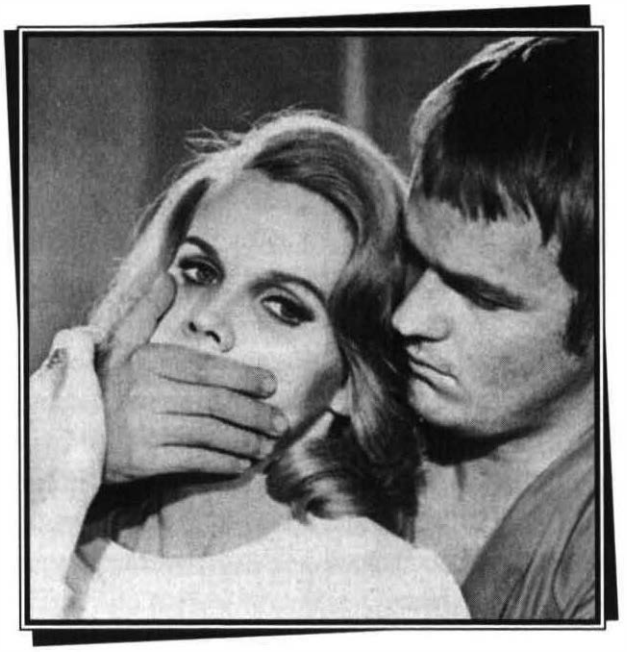






While the comparatively tony Cinerama showcased some of the artier Eurosex offerings, you had to stay at the Liberty for the most violent Eurosleaze. Some of the most pungent Liberty headliners were giallos, melodramatic arias of bloody death set to Roman cha-cha cocktail music, with characters who invariably invite disturbed sexual psychopaths into their lives, to disastrous effect. Though born in Italy—"giallo" is Italian for "yellow," the color in which the covers of depraved pulp paperbacks were printed—there were a number of French-Spanish coproductions in the genre, and its acting pool was drawn from a mix of Europeans and American character actors who'd begun to have difficulty finding work in the States. The tradition of welcoming these expatriates was born during the Hollywood witchhunts of the 1950s, when politically persecuted talents like Eddie Constantine fled to Europe after refusing to give names of supposed communists in the film community to Joe McCarthy. Other American actors found work abroad after playing sexually driven roles too believably, and thereafter being confused with their on-screen personae. Giallos value these American stars for aesthetic reasons—in using them as leads, the giallos appropriate their stigmas for maximum exaggerated effect—but mostly they're just good box office, making the films an easy sell to the international film market.

From the actor's standpoint, being in a giallo was a disorienting experience, which often fed their apprehensive or aggressive performances. They were put up



Lou Castel shows Carroll Baker where it's at, giallo style, in *Paranoia*. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)

at shabby motels, fed lousy meals, forced to work long hours, ordered around by crew members with incomprehensible accents, and, in the end, were playing out sinister scenes that went beyond the pale of U.S. releases in terms of sex, nudity, and, most especially, violence.

Mario Bava's stylish *Blood and Black Lace* (1965) was a giallo precursor, but the first scream that established the genre on the Deuce, and provided the template for the giallos that followed, was *Paranoia* (1969). In this film, relatively graphic sex is used within the context of a violent, sadistically driven situation. Men are nothing but brutes, human battering rams. The female victim is in a slowly dehumanizing, inescapable situation, her constant mental confusion feeding her victimizers. There are twist endings within multiple double-crosses. Constant Europop music, overlighting, and obvious dubbing all combine to build a hyper yet airless quality.

*Paranoia* had a bold ad campaign with a caricature of its aged *Baby Doll* star, Carroll Baker, in mid-scream with the tag line "*Paranoia* sucks you into a whirlpool of erotic love." Giallos always got more lowdown than their puritanical Americano counterparts.

Acting a good ten years over her real age, Carroll exploits her aging Lolita image to the hilt, starring as a rich, bored widow who arrives in Rome in the company of her beloved attorney to relax in a villa. She's been pampered all her life. Unable to do anything for herself, she surrounds herself with people who run things for her. One day, she's lounging around the villa popping pills and washing them down with mid-afternoon highballs when a young, aggressive gigolo (Lou Castel) cons his way in with the help of a lame excuse. His thuggish, narcissistic sexuality is the right/wrong sadistic lure for her.

In no time, the gigolo gets down to business and goes down on a grateful Carroll in the shower, a shocking softcore scene for the time. Lou brings Carroll to his po' boy Roman SRO, which has a James Dean poster as its dominant decoration. She pays his back rent and promptly drives him back to her mansion in her white Rolls. She's decided to keep him.

The gigolo's "sister" shows up on the doorstep. Excellently cast in this devious role is Colette Descombes, her petite, shapely figure capped with a short pixie/butch haircut. Colette begins feeding Carroll even more pills. Uppers, downers, spiking her drinks with potions—they do it all. Carroll begins having woozy hallucinations, wandering through her house, wracked in nightmarish horror as she encounters an oil painting of herself as a young girl. The photography seems filmed through a shot glass. The use of red lighting and off-kilter shots, while simple and inexpensive, are extremely effective in reproducing the state of being slowly overdosed on liquor and prescription pills.

Drunk and stoned, Carroll slides into a degenerate three-way with the scheming couple, then becomes enraged when she finds Lou and Colette fucking without her, revealing that they're no brother-sister act but rather scam artists on the make, trying to get their hands on her abundant cash. They've turned her into a prisoner in her own home by fucking and drugging her into submission. After sexually debasing her and involving her in lesbianism, the gigolo asks Carroll how she feels about herself. She spits out the classic line, "When I think of myself, I want to vomit. But I'm nowhere near as nauseating as you two." Colette tosses a drink in Carroll's face for her thoughts as the audience cracked up, enjoying the sparks.

Carroll wants them out, of course, but they blackmail her with films and photos of their S&M orgies, which star her as the centerpiece. She tries to throw money at them, but they just won't leave. The situation turns into a kidnap-

victim/slave scenario, which the film milks for every fetishistic angle. Carroll, clad in blue work shirt and black slacks, tries to catfight her way to freedom by battling with Colette. The gigolo gives Carroll a belt beating for her troubles. The couple torments her with earsplitting bad Europop when she's in a dizzy pill stupor verging on overdose, blasting the same annoying song over and over. When her lawyer visits, she's tied up and gagged in the bedroom. They simply tell him she's sleeping. "You know how she is . . ." They wag their heads conspiratorily.

Carroll finds a telegram on her floor notifying her that her lawyer is dead, and becomes hysterical. Finally, she gets her nerve up, retrieves her gun, and shoots the gigolo, but then his corpse isn't there—it's another twisted scene to spook her. The couple feed her a tumbler of liquor spiked with enough downers to make it look like suicide, but Carroll spills the drink over and lurches for the window, where she magically sees her lawyer coming to rescue her. She climbs out to the ledge to signal him but ends up falling. Half dead, Carroll expects her lawyer to rush to her, but instead he picks up her body and tosses it down a stone staircase, finishing the job he had hired the couple to do.

This shocker leads to the double-twist ending. The lawyer flees to England but is promptly snitched out by the gigolo couple and arrested by Scotland Yard. The couple breezes away in a sports car as the same pop jingle they tormented Carroll with plays on the radio. As they're snickering about how it was Carroll's "favorite song," they smash into a truck and are both killed.

*Paranoia* is the ultimate submissive frightmare of a rich, bored middle-aged widow loaded on pills and alcohol and victimized by leeches. A few simple visuals—the right use of the myopic zoom lens, colors slightly distorted—capture the nausea of the mental and physical toxicity with unnerving accuracy. *Paranoia* established director Umberto Lenzi as king of the giallos, an effective melodramatist with an edge, who delivered the goods. Lenzi was sleazier and more bluntly sexual than more revered figures like Mario Bava and Dario Argento. While the younger Castel and Descombes carry most of the nudity in the film, Carroll is sexy in a boozy, blonde, hash-house-waitress way.

Baker had left America after a series of erotically audacious yet unappreciated roles, like her portrayal of Jean Harlow in *Harlow* (1965). She later wrote of having her own breakdowns, but this only feeds the apprehension and confusion in her character's motivation. Baker continued to act in other Italian exploitation

movies, including the giallo *The Sweet Body of Deborah* (1970) and the adaptation of the comic strip *Baba Yaga* (1973), where a highlight features her nude and blindfolded, led by a uniformed woman. After her stint as a giallo gal, she returned to the United States and successfully resumed her career as a character actress. Today, Carroll shows up at Chiler Theatre conventions to sign autographs, but disdains speaking to fans about these sexy roles.

*Paranoia* was released through Commonwealth United, a distribution outfit that specialized in such offbeat gems as Joe McGrath's adaptation of Terry Southern's *The Magic Christian* and Jess Franco's *99 Women.* The runaway success of *Paranoia* gave Deuce distributor Joseph Brenner the idea to pounce on this new, profitable market. Brenner had been in the business of giving jazzed-up campaigns to sexy European imports since the 1960s, and gave his giallos snazzy titles that would appeal to any grindhouse ticket buyer. Over the years, Brenner's giallos would bounce all over the Deuce, from the Liberty to the Selwyn to the Lyric and back again.



Admittedly, from the audience standpoint, seeing a Brenner release was a gamble—he could merely be serving up a boring Italian gangster opus like *Milano Odia* (1974), hiding it in 1981 behind a horror-slanted campaign and a totally misleading title like *Almost Human.* If duped, the audience would groan angrily, head for the candy stand, smoke a joint, complain to other audience members, then settle in for the tried-and-true second or third feature. Happily, in the case of such popular Brenner replays as *Autopsy* (1974) and *Eyeball* (1975), the movies were as much fun as their lurid ads and trailers promised. The shuffling in the aisles would be punctuated by spontaneous jokes and loud laughter from the audience.

One of the most popular giallos, *Autopsy* played a good eight-year stretch as a second feature after its healthy first run. The picture had the advantage of starring two terrific American exports. Mimsy Farmer was mostly known as the tall, willowy, blonde ice queen in the AIP teen classic *Riot on Sunset Strip,* but she'd also done a brilliant, hip turn as a heroin-addicted temptress in Barbet Schroeder's drug-soaked *More,* an art house hit that contained a good deal of explicit sex by 1969 standards. Playing opposite Mimsy in *Autopsy* is Barry Primus, a talented character actor who'd appeared in Scorsese's early film *Box-*

*car Bertha. Autopsy*'s merits and popularity are inseparable from its two leads, who give tremendous, contrasting performances—Mimsy's opiated cool versus Primus's manic intensity.

Mimsy plays a medical grad student who works in a morgue. She's researching a thesis about how real and faked suicides differ in appearance, but her job is getting to her. On the brink of nervous exhaustion, she begins having hallucinations of grinning black men rising off the morgue slabs and having orgies with the other stiffs, especially with an overweight woman covered in scars. The sight of the dead black guy returning to life stark naked, smiling and ready for sex, wracked the Liberty with gales of laughter.

It doesn't help Mimsy's mental stability that she's undergoing constant sexual harassment by a greasy, ass-pinching foreign coworker (a situation that's ubiquitous in the giallo genre). This particular slimeball specializes in reconstructing and making up the corpses after the autopsies are over, taking a perverted sadistic glee in his task. Mimsy's troubles start in earnest when she accepts a ride from this troublemaker, who tries to rip her skirt off in the car.

An unidentified girl's body turns up at the morgue. The authorities want to write it off as suicide, but the victim's brother (Primus) identifies her and, convinced she's been murdered, sets out to find the killer. Primus is a priest plagued by weird psychic abilities. Much to the glee of the Liberty audience, he's also one of the biggest fireballs of a clergyman ever seen in movies, a brawling, bullying wildman who makes Jason Miller in *The Exorcist* seem merely sulky in comparison. Pushy and heavy, Primus takes suspects on speeding car rides, gives them the third degree, grabs irritants by the lapels, and slugs it out with his antagonists. For added weirdness, he admits his love for Mimsy but won't renounce his vow of chastity, torturing himself as he gazes at her longingly from the church steps. Most of the audience laughed when some joker in the dark yelled out, "If the guy got laid, he wouldn't be blowing off so much steam!"

Could the killer be Mimsy's dandy of a dad, who greets her as if she's some dollybird he's picked up at the beach? But Mimsy's jet-set layabout boyfriend, with whom she shares a long, graphic sexual encounter, turns out to be the murderer. Primus tries to save him, anyway, as he dangles by his arm off a terrace, only to see the killer go splat on the piazza below.

*Autopsy* strikes an off-kilter balance between its grotesque necrophiliac subtext, well-executed straightforward sex scenes, surprisingly effective mystery melodrama plot, and occasional overamped frustrated sexual hilarity.

*The Girl in Room 2A* (1974), is one of the most notoriously sadistic of the giallos, alternating between moodiness, ultraviolence, and fantasy-fulfillment outbursts of S&M. After some tentative initial dates in the U.S. under the try-out title *Terror in 2A* in 1974, Eurosleaze distributor Group 1 opened the movie in earnest in the fall of 1976. The eye-grabbing campaign promised "a prison in hell!" to Deuce audiences and featured a photo of a nude woman chained to a wall, an enormous bullwhip about to strike her. The film was on a double bill with a Brenner re-cut of a now R-rated *Ginger*, discussed in detail later in the book.

The heroine is released from a minor jail sentence for stealing. The local authorities shuffle her off to a halfway house run by a bitter old crow and her sexually stunted, mother-dominated son. A drunk driver killed the landlady's husband long ago, and now she has a bone to pick with the criminal justice system. Our heroine is nervous. The old bag calms her with sedatives, but she has recurring nightmares about blood dripping from the ceiling and forming an angry red pool on the floor of her bedroom.



Unbeknownst to the heroine, the halfway house is a hotbed for a cult of neo-Nietzscheans led by the sinister Mr. Drees (Raf Vallone, the once-macho sex symbol of *Bitter Rice,* now aged and competing with his own bad combover for attention on screen) and a figure flitting about in a cheap red mask and Santo cape get-up. The cult is dedicated to torturing and killing people whom their lunatic members feel are morally unfit. Their manias are fixated on the female ex-cons at the halfway house, who keep disappearing or going insane.

The heroine hooks up with a guy whose sister disappeared from the halfway house, and together they visit a girl who's in an insane asylum after escaping the cultists. Her flashback provides *The Girl in Room 2A*'s centerpiece, a prolonged and realistic torture chamber session with women chained in a cave. One woman is tied to an X-cross, her dress is torn off, and she gets flogged across her bared breasts. Another topless victim is chained by her arms and given an old-fashioned whipping across her bared back, completing the scene with loud howls of discomfort. A memorable cameo is provided at the climax by Eurosleaze superstar Karin Schubert, who's stripped to the waist and flogged for adultery, acting the suppli-

cant with a "yes, I'll repent" before the cult decapitates her. Of such moments is the legend of *The Girl in Room 2A* built.

*Paranoia*'s Umberto Lenzi directed the popular Brenner release *Eyeball,* a Mobius strip about a group of tourists getting bussed around Barcelona. After one of them is attacked and robbed of an eye, a series of identical murders commences. Is the culprit an angry over-the-hill supermodel who's doped out and suffers blackouts? Is it a priest who keeps discovering the bodies? Eventually the wrong guy is accused, but he manages to lead the detectives to the killer—his estranged wife, who has a glass eye.

*Eyeball* is remarkable for its blunt, shocking violence, which predates the slasher format and is much more obsessive and realistic. Most jarring is the scene where a farm girl falls victim to the murderer while feeding pigs in a sty. When she falls, the pigs begin eating her corpse.

After the success of *Last House on the Left* (see chapter 6), its distributor, Hallmark, began importing giallos and promoting them with *Last House*'s classic "it's only a movie" ad campaign. Some Hallmark giallos include *Second House from the Left* (1974), an exercise in graphic malevolence and sadism also known as *The Night Train Murders.* Two degenerates corner two innocent, terrified girls on a train and brutally rape and murder them. It's a disturbing movie that had a surprisingly limited run, considering the sadistically inclined Times Square audience. Another ultraviolent Hallmark presentation was *The Apartment on the 13th Floor* (1974), a Spanish import that concerned a slaughterhouse employee who starts butchering his neighbors. The graphic slaughterhouse footage wedded to the explicit violence made the film a true stomach turner.

Hallmark released Mario Bava's infamous *Twitch of the Death Nerve* (1974) as *Last House on the Left 2.* A stalker (from whose point of view we see the murders) systematically knocks off vacationers by a lake. Unfortunately, *Last House on the Left 2* disappointed the 42nd Street audience, which had come prepared for something more hopping. The print was missing key shock scenes, like a decapitation, which had either been trimmed for an official R rating from the MPAA or had wound up in the gore clips collection of some mischievous projectionist. Nonetheless, *Last House on the Left 2* provided a very exact template for the big-budget slasher movie, *Friday the 13th.*

Another explicit Hallmark giallo was Fernando Di Leo's *Slaughter Hotel*

(1975), which concluded with a crude re-enactment of a Richard Speck–flavored nurse-murder spree. The height of Di Leo's malevolence, however, was *Being Twenty* (1979), which starts out as the *Candide*-like sexual adventures of blonde Tina (Gloria Guida) and brunette Lia (Lilli Carati), who describe themselves with the mantra "we're young, beautiful, and pissed off." Our heroines hitchhike to a commune where they expect to get laid, but they're disappointed to find that it's populated by impotent drug addicts, political cranks, and crooks, including one goofball who sits in different yoga contortions. The commune also houses such incongruous societal dropouts as a woman raising a small baby.

The girls turn to each other for sexual relief in scenes that approach hardcore. Jingly Italian movie music accompanies shots of the duo skipping down the street. Adding yet another stylistic movie layer is a subplot about a cinema verité documentarian making a movie about the commune residents. Both the heroines are interviewed about their backgrounds, telling how they've become alienated from straight society, and about how their childhoods were so disturbing that they set out on a pleasure quest to make up for lost time. They're two cute, non-lethal delinquents.



Soon, the caftan-wearing old queen who runs the commune tries to pimp the girls. The cops raid the commune for drugs. The girls are brought to court, where the judge tells them to get out of town. They hitchhike away from this claustrophobic mess to an inn off the side of a dirt road. Inside, they drop quarters in the jukebox and do their usual erotic horsing around. A terrifying group of local thugs and gangsters are watching them. They're dark and intense men who believe women truly should not be heard. When you see these folks, you get an ominous feeling.

In an utterly shocking twist, these men rape and murder our freewheeling protagonists in the woods and dump their bodies there. When these miscreants jam a huge tree stump into Lia's vagina, it's among the most disgusting and yet slickly executed of sex-crime movie endings, nihilistic in the most real and emotionally devastating ways, leaving one in a haze of aftershock. There's blood, nudity, and explicit sex, and the little left to the imagination is all the more disturbing. It's a genuine heartbreaker to all nerds who like their women breathing, but it also represents a direct, blunt, and fatal level of misogyny that is the giallos' stock in trade.

*Being Twenty* is Di Leo's most amazing, accomplished, and schizophrenic movie, operating in many genres and styles at the same time. It's a road picture, an Italian sex comedy, softcore pornography, and violent snuff giallo. Unlike other exploitation movies, *Being Twenty* has always curiously played down its severe nature in its ad campaign, hence lending it its heavy reputation.

The hippie/drifter aspect of the heroines' search for an "anything goes" meta-sexual utopia has overtones of the late 1960s, a decade before the film was made. The fictionalized verité approach actually draws you emotionally close to the heroines, making the film all the sadder in the end.

*Being Twenty*'s ending is the most terrifying, terminal example of the "if you flaunt it, I have the right to take what you won't give me" mentality of men who'd kill women as easily as they'd squash a fly. These men consider women the cause of their inner torment, so when the female is eliminated, so is their discomfort. This terminal sex threat is behind a myriad of "beware of men" myths that are the basis of hang-ups for many sexually confident, aggressive women—i.e., if you act yourself, you could be killed. It's the type of thinking that leads women to act prudish as a defense mechanism.

In a typical all-bases-covered distribution move, some prints of *Being Twenty* played uncut, while other versions cut the gruesome ending and instead showed the girls happily scampering away. Some of its shocking scenes undoubtedly wound up in projectionists' private collections. The film remains a banned legend to this day in its native Italy.

As the giallo moved into the 1980s, two of its most shocking exponents hit the Deuce. In 1983, as the popularity of the dull, domestically made *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th* type xeroxes was at its peak, *Pieces* went straight for the jugular. It stars Christopher George, one of the hardest working men in the exploitation business. Chris started out in the black-and-white World War II TV series *Rat Patrol,* which became familiar to insomniacs via late-night reruns. Occasionally working with his wife, Lynda Day George, Chris took on any role to pay the bills, no matter how cheap the movie, no matter in what corner of the world. In *Pieces,* Chris is at his most world-weary and craggy. You can practically hear the ice clinking in his glass of Jack Daniels after the eighteen-hour shoot, and the cellophane crinkling as he opens his third pack of cigarettes. But that world-weariness gave Chris a coolness few actors, like Eddie Constantine, can effortlessly achieve.

*Pieces* opens in 1942. A little boy is assembling a puzzle of a nude woman. His mother begins scolding him. He hacks her apart. The police find him bloodied and crying in the closet, his innocence automatically assumed. His mother's head is on a shelf, her legs elsewhere.

Cut to the present. A series of murders besets a private high school. The killer carves up his victims with a chainsaw and saves mementos of each body. What the puzzle maker is assembling should be obvious. But has he grown up to be the school's dean or the bearded, slobbering handyman? Chris, wearing a jaded expression and looking like he's suffering from nervous exhaustion, plays the investigating detective.

The narrative bulk of the film is uninteresting but adequate as a connecting sequence between the extreme violence, all of which is given twisted sexual connotations. Lethal objects are carried like cartoon phallic symbols. A girl becomes a bloody mess as she roller-skates into a mirror. Another victim is decapitated in slow motion. A topless woman becomes the focus of a long, sadistic chase through a locker room. When she's cornered in a shower, cowering, there's a close-up of her pissing her pants before she gets sawed in half. A *pièce de résistance* castration scene—curiously indicated by bloody dungarees and a horrific tearing sound—completes the movie and fulfills the whole roughie scenario.





*Pieces* ultimately registers as a series of blunt shocks rather than broken taboos. It was one of the few movies at the time that silenced the most raucous grindhouse audiences. You could hear a pin drop in the theater.

*Pieces* producer Dick Randall had also made the lurid, Mondo-style documentary *The Wild, Wild World of Jayne Mansfield* (1968), and had worked with fetish pioneer Bob Cresse. After the completion of *Pieces,* Christopher George died prematurely from a heart attack. Perhaps it was the stress of appearing in films like this, flying to foreign countries, working long hours, living in a state of perpetual jet lag.

American expatriate turned giallo star David Hess is exploitation movies' favorite sexually aggressive heavy, a role that has been his forte since *Last House on the Left.* The Hess character quickly escalates from dirty talk and fistfights to rape, pulling off these assaults with the strength and gusto of a mental patient.

Hess occupies the same cinematic room as George Payne or Jamie Gillis, albeit in a slightly more socially acceptable (non-hardcore) manner. He's a sadist

because his tantrums scare most people into submission and compliance-—especially women. Men just don't want to deal with him. Hess plays guys who need to crumple every man and make every woman their slave. Everybody, from a liquor store clerk to his kidnap victims, has to be made into his bitch. His need to dominate leaves most people fleeing, hustling him on his way, or acquiescing in terror to get him out of their faces as quickly as possible.

Hess was originally a songwriter, penning such hits as "All Shook Up" for Elvis, but he always wanted to be an actor. At a recent appearance at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, Hess said that he would have acted in *Last House* even if it had ended up being a hardcore sex movie, as was originally planned. Although *Last House* was a hit, Hess subsequently had difficulty getting work. Producers would confuse him with the character he played. Hess admitted their assessment at the time wasn't too off the mark.

Undaunted, Hess worked his niche in Europe, bringing his trademark sexual thuggery to a memorable series of giallos. Ruggero Deodato's *House on the Edge of the Park* (1985) provided him with one of his most memorable appearances on the Deuce, playing a garage attendant with a halfwit sidekick (ubiquitous giallo player John Morghen). Before the credits even unfold, Hess rapes a girl at a disco. Later, he and Morghen crash a rich peoples' party and rape and abuse the guests. 'Natch, by the end, the tables are turned and it's been a revenge setup all along.

Hess is at his most explosively terroristic in this film. At his mildest, he calls a black stripper type "Roots," much to the amusement of the Deuce audience. Moving up the nausea scale, Hess punches the hero's face in, throws him into a swimming pool, and takes a piss on his bloodied face while laughing. Finally, at his most depraved and excruciatingly painful, Hess silently carves up the virginal white-soxed legs of a young next-door neighbor.

Deodato couches *House on the Edge of the Park* within pseudo-intellectual commentary about class struggles and capitalism. The lumpenproletariat Hess and his pal are pitted against bourgeois men and their rich, frigid bitches. One of the women gets raped by the dimwit, but then pities her attacker when her boyfriend finally offs him. Yet the movie's real focus is on blatant sadism carried to a bitter extreme.

Even though Deodato doesn't get to actually hurt or kill any living creatures here—unlike in his contributions to the cannibal vomitorium genre discussed

later in this chapter—his profound misanthropy and low regard for human life blares through. Despite its problems, though, *House* proves Deodato's talent for precise composition, ability to make tightly controlled, tense movies, and knack for bringing out the best in his actors—Hess's performance is one of his most galvanizing.

The zombie-movie subgenre was another Italian horror export popular on the Deuce. These were frequently made by giallo directors, but unlike giallos, the antagonists of zombie flicks are dead, which takes away a lot of their oomph. (The exception being Giallo master Umberto Lenzi's *City of the Walking Dead* from 1983, in which the zombies run instead of plod along, feed on blood rather than flesh, and in their livelier moments rip off breasts and cut throats.) The most heavily hyped was the subgenre's progenitor, Lucio Fulci's *Zombie* (1980), a crude rip-off of George Romero's *Dawn of the Dead.* Released stateside by Jerry Gross, its grindhouse premiere was publicized by posters wheatpasted throughout Manhattan, featuring the caption "we are going to eat you" over the rotting face of a ghoul, who seemed to have a slight smirk. *Zombie* mostly takes place on a Caribbean island, where voodoo has created an outbreak of flesh-eating ghouls. Like many films in its subgenre, *Zombie* plods along, completely devoid of brains or suspense, even though it's packed with gut-munching scenes.



Horror mavens obsessed with gross special effects seem to get the biggest charge out of *Zombie*'s idiotic eye-impaling scene, which practically takes place in slow motion. But the most laughable highlight here is a sort of underwater ballet between a dummy shark and a ghoul attempting to dine on it. The sound is so badly post-synced that it seems to have been recorded underwater.

*Zombie*'s cast included Mia Farrow's less famous sister, Tisa, who had played a key role in exposing the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi as a fraud to the Beatles, revealing him as just a dirty old man pinching a starlet's bum. By the time she starred in Joe D'Amato's *The Grim Reaper* (1981), Tisa had become a fixture of the zombie subgenre. In *Reaper,* tourists visiting a Greek island become food for a lunatic cannibal who's already devoured all the locals. The cannibal has no particular charisma or power, yet his victims die cowering before him. The movie looks trimmed for an R rating, but is so dull that more graphic scenes wouldn't have mattered, anyway. A handful of bad special effects made the audience laugh—for

instance, a joke store-rubber mask in a bucket, representing a severed head—but are few and far between.

The most revered Italian zombie movie is Lucio Fulci's *Seven Doors of Death* (Italian opening 1981; Deuce opening 1983), which has a picturesque quality that the 42nd Street audience could really groove on, since most of them were stoned on everything from pot to smack. The opening contains an unpleasant but effective shock. A devil-worshipping painter in the 1920s South specializes in Boschian landscapes. The hotel he resides in is located over one of the seven gates to hell. Local yokels break his arms, crucify him, and throw hot lime on his body. Cut to the present, where a woman renovating the hotel releases the painter's spirit, which gouges out eyes and has zombie followers. At its best, *Seven Doors* achieves a visually intriguing dime-store surrealism.

Italy's most dubious horror achievement was birthing the cannibal vomitorium genre. These are among the most appallingly violent movies ever made, a deranged hybrid of giallo melodramatics and Mondo movie disgust. The violence promised by the zombie movies is delivered in amplified spades, and sometimes can be shockingly real. The films' plots about Westerners lost in the jungle are mere frameworks for some of the most grotesque outbursts of violence ever recorded on film. Cannibal movies take you on a carnival ride to hell, where scenes of actual animal abuse alternate with hideous simulations of natives dining on other human beings. Cannibal movies are heavy numbers to lay on an audience, producing an anxiety that fuels the suspense of the situation. They even left the Liberty crowd shaking, cowering, and occasionally hollering in sympathetic pain. You may get sick, but that's part of their appeal.

Cannibal vomitoriums are also among the most morally reprehensible of all exploitation genres. Unlike some of the more thoughtful Mondo movies, where there is a genuine concern with bizarre human behavior, cannibal movies trade in unadulterated nihilism. Their most disturbing aspect is the attitude of the filmmakers, globe-trotting papagallos like Ruggero Deodato and Umberto Lenzi who built their chops making violent giallos. When operating in the cannibal vomitorium mode, these directors share Mondo man Gualtiero Jacopetti's misanthropic view that life is disposable. To produce these films, the directors had to trap their cast members in remote parts of the world and subject them to a host of indigni-

ties. When you're filming in the middle of the Amazon, walking off the set isn't as easy as dropping a token in a turnstile and hopping on a subway.

The two that started it all on the Deuce were Umberto Lenzi's *Man from Deep River* (1973; Deuce opening 1977) and Ruggero Deodato's *The Last Survivor* (1977). In *Deep River* a Nordic looking, camera-toting hero wanders through Thailand and is captured by a native tribe that puts him through several irritating paces, most notably suspending him from a wooden cage over his head and shooting him with darts. Eventually, after all the abuse, the hero is accepted by the tribe and, influenced by his romance with a native girl (Me Me Lai, the cannibal vomitorium's favorite leading lady), decides that life in the wild is more satisfying than the civilized world. Through it all, Ms. Lai's model's good looks and plastered smile make her look like she's in a Filipino deodorant commercial.

*Man from Deep River*'s cannibal scenes look phony, but Lenzi compensates with repugnant scenes of animal abuse that we could all live without: a monkey's head getting sliced off and its brains devoured, a mongoose pitted against a cobra, and a crocodile vivisection. The entire movie looks haphazardly put together, as if Lenzi was suffering from malaria and just photographed anything that caught his eye and flung it in the stew. The solemn narration by the hero gives some much-needed unintentional laughs, and lends some coherence to an otherwise messy ninety minutes. Despite its erratic quality, *Man from Deep River* became a constant replay under the catchier title *Sacrifice.*

*The Last Survivor,* which was bluntly retitled *Carnivorous* after its initial run, is far superior. It's a powerful, gut-busting horror film that established the cannibal vomitorium genre as a Deuce staple. *Carnivorous*'s storyline is a traditional lost-in-the-jungle affair. Europeans on a scientific expedition are forced to land their plane in a remote part of the Philippines. Except for the pilot (Ivan Rassimov), they are then lost or killed in grotesque ways. The foulest native tribe imaginable captures Rassimov and cages him with birds. Little boys who look like they hopped off the cover of Led Zeppelin's *Houses of the Holy* urinate on and stone him. A bird from his cage is fed to a crocodile, which is then slit open so that the bird's semidigested carcass can be retrieved. A feast ensues. Realizing that he's the natives' next meal, Rassimov escapes with the aid of Me Me Lai. Rassimov flees to his plane, and Ms. Lai becomes dinner instead.

Deodato creates an unbearable tension by letting the viewer expect the worst

He dared the forbidden river!
WHERE ADVENTURE ENDS
...AND HELL BEGINS!
SEE! The torture that makes a modern man defenseless!
SEE! The ritual that frees a woman to love again!
SEE! The barbaric punishment of a trapped betrayer!
SEE! The love of a tribal girl for the man from outside!
JOSEPH BRENNER ASSOCIATES, INC. Presents
MAN FROM DEEP RIVER
R RESTRICTED Under 17 requires accompanying Parent or Adult Guardian
MAN FROM DEEP RIVER Starring IVAN RASSIMOV/ME ME LAY
Directed by UMBERTO LENZI/ Produced by GIORGIO C. ROSSI/OVIDIO G. ASSONITIS FOR ROAS PRODUCTIONS/MEDUSA
A JOSEPH BRENNER ASSOCIATES, INC. RELEASE TECHNICOLOR®/TECHNISCOPE®

Giallo director Umberto Lenzi gets down to business in his precedent-setting cannibal movie *Man from Deep River* (aka *Sacrifice*). (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)

and allowing it to happen. His directorial skill lies in capturing the appropriate image in a tight composition. The numerous bloody deaths, ghastly intertribal inhumanities, and cannibalism scenes are appalling and overwhelming on a big screen, and are especially disturbing when accompanied by Muzak and Mondo-like subtitles insistently and disgustingly proclaiming "actual scene of. . . ." Most peculiar is the concluding statement that the events were true, followed by the distributor's disclaimer that any similarity to real events was strictly coincidental.

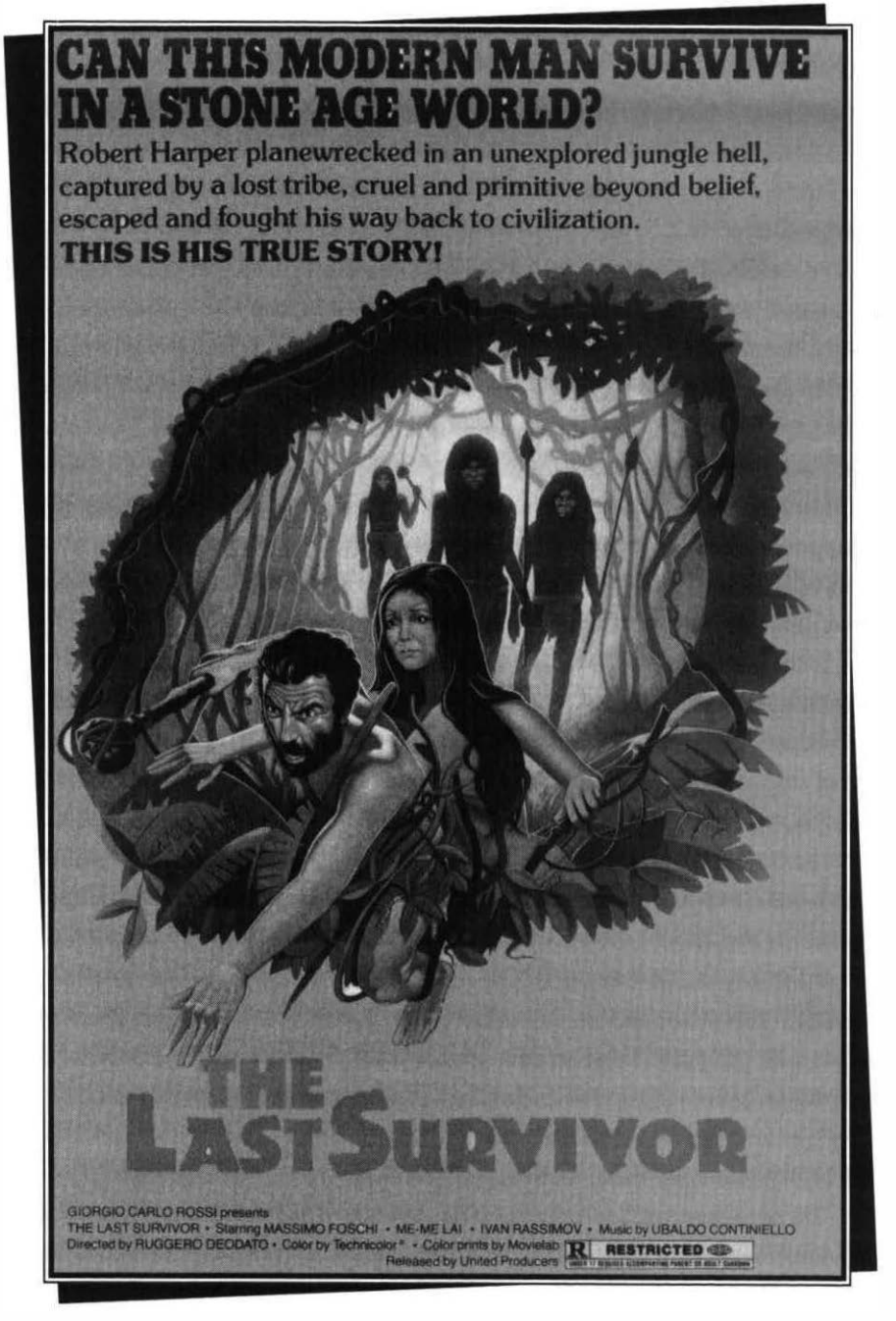
The sheer level of violence made it clear that the R rating slapped on *Carnivorous*'s poster was phony. Although there were a few titters in the Liberty when the natives piss on Rassimov, the movie pulverized the audience. The film remains the cannibal classic, one that retains its ability to horrify even after repeated viewings.

The 1980s saw *Trap Them and Kill Them* (1977; Deuce opening 1983), known on home video as *Emanuelle and the Last Cannibals. Emmanuelle 2* supporting player Laura Gemser is the protagonist lost in the jungle. The ubiquitous John Morghen gets his balls cut off in a badly done optical effect. *Trap Them* was heavily hyped with trailers and lobby displays on the Deuce, but though it's one of Italian horror director Joe D'Amato's bloodier efforts, it's also one of his dullest.

During the unbearably hot summer of 1983, *Make Them Die Slowly* (European opening 1981) constantly promised the Deuce audience that they would see the ultimate cannibal film. You'd walk into any grindhouse and get assaulted by the film's unforgettable trailer, which highlighted cannibalism, dismemberment, castration, and, as the sadistic *pièce de résistance,* a woman being hung by hooks through her breasts, all flying at you with machine gun rapidity. The mocking female voice on the trailer threatened that *Make Them Die Slowly* was "the most violent movie ever made."

The film finally opened in grand style on a hot September Friday night at the Liberty, whose lobby was filled for the occasion with oversized posters, small billboards, and graphic stills of flesh-eating natives, horrified Americans, and what had by then become the totemic breast-hanging sequence. The audience settled into the Liberty's comfortable seats, which all offered a good view of the screen, and got ready to be horrified.

*Make Them Die Slowly* opens in New York, where two mobsters gun down a dope addict in his connection's apartment. This giallo plot device leads into the


CAN THIS MODERN MAN SURVIVE IN A STONE AGE WORLD?
Robert Harper planewrecked in an unexplored jungle hell, captured by a lost tribe, cruel and primitive beyond belief, escaped and fought his way back to civilization.
THIS IS HIS TRUE STORY!
THE LAST SURVIVOR
GIORGIO CARLO ROSSI presents
THE LAST SURVIVOR • Starring MASSIMO FOSCHI • ME-ME LAI • IVAN RASSIMOV • Music by UBALDO CONTINIELLO
Directed by RUGGERO DEODATO • Color by Technicolor® • Color prints by Movielab
Released by United Producers
R RESTRICTED

Ruggero Deodato's classic cannibal vomitorium, first known as *The Last Survivor*, then *Carnivorous*. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)

cannibal story that comprises most of the movie. Turns out the connection, Mike, and his scummy pal Joe had ripped off the mobsters, then fled to South America to hunt for emeralds and cocaine. Mike uses too much blow, becomes toxically insane, and tortures a native guide to death in front of his own tribe.

The two hellraisers run into Rudy, Pat, and Gloria. Gloria is doing a thesis at NYU based on the premise that cannibalism doesn't exist. The minute their jeep breaks down in the jungle and you see a native chewing a slug, you know there's trouble ahead. Before long, Joe dies from fever. Mike and Pat get stoned on cocaine and fuck, and Mike pointlessly kills a native girl. That's it! The native tribe hunts down and captures the unlucky foursome.

Cut back to New York, where Rob Kerman plays a detective investigating the disappearances and related murders. Rob was better known under his nom de porn of R. Bolla, and was immediately recognizable to the audience from skinflicks like *Debbie Does Dallas* or *G-Strings,* playing the Victory Theater right across the street. Rob authorizes a rescue team to go to South America. As they're searching for the lost Americans, Rudy meets a mercifully quick end. Mike is dismembered, castrated, and has his brains eaten in a cannibal feast. Pat is the victim of the excruciatingly sickening breast hanging. Gloria escapes with the help of a sympathetic native, who's quickly killed.

The film ends ironically, with Gloria receiving her doctorate and publishing her thesis. In it, she denies the existence of cannibalism, keeping the hideous events she's witnessed on her investigative journey a secret.

*Make Them Die Slowly* is ultraviolent and unrelenting. It's also morally bankrupt and manipulative. In short, it shakes you from start to finish, beating you to a bloody pulp. There wasn't one member of the Liberty Theater audience who didn't holler or groan aloud during the course of the movie. *Make Them Die Slowly* was an epochal event in horror movies. Much like *Blood Feast* two decades before, it challenged the audience's expectations and surpassed them.

The cocaine-crazed villain made *Make Them Die* all too believable to inner city denizens, and the Manhattan locations and presence of Rob Kerman brought a velour familiarity to the 42nd Street crowd. Although he gives off an asexual vibe, Rob was used in porn because his balding, paunchy look was homely enough that it didn't make regular guys feel threatened. Rob was a neighborhood fixture who lived nearby in the rent-controlled Manhattan Plaza apartments on West

42nd Street off 9th Avenue, and had been a veteran of porn films for about three decades, from the early Bob Wolfe peep booth loops to hardcore pornography's switch to video in the 1980s.

Rob got involved in the Euro-productions after playing a gay talent agent in an Italian movie. As he explained, "I'm not gay but I stuck my hand down a guy's pants. Then Ruggero Deodato called me to be in the Italian copy of *Airport '79* [*The Concord Affair*]. It was shot on Long Island. I played the air traffic controller. I had fifteen minutes of screen time, and when I saw the film, the editing had me acting opposite people like Joseph Cotton. They felt they were in a state of decline, but I was *acting.* Deodato was really nice to me. He took me out to a French restaurant and gave me a $500 bonus, which was a lot of money in those days."

*Cannibal Holocaust* (1979; Deuce opening 1985) is Ruggero Deodato's answer to *Make Them Die Slowly.* It was as if Lenzi and Deodato were using the cannibal mode as a gladiator competition to see who could be more disgusting. With *Cannibal Holocaust,* Deodato uses a similarly flimsy storyline and the same star, Rob Kerman, who in this film wears a constantly sour facial expression, which is apropos considering what a stinker it is.

*Holocaust*'s plot, already derivative, was later used as a template for the indie horror hit *The Blair Witch Project.* In it, Rob plays an NYU professor sent to the jungle to investigate the deaths of four young reporters. He meets some natives that think he's God when he plays a tape recording of his voice. They lead him to the remains of the reporters and their film cans. Back in Manhattan, Rob screens the footage for use in a possible documentary. Deodato uses the film-within-the-film technique as another arty mask for his inherent nihilism.

The films Rob watches turn out to be grainy, home-movie quality loops of the Americans committing atrocities and getting killed. The moral punch comes when Rob screens the final footage of them getting massacred and devoured by the tribe, and refuses to have anything to do with it.

*Cannibal Holocaust* moves from one torture scene to the next, with the Manhattan footage used like a connecting sequence in a hardcore roughie. The sequences are grotesque and beyond vile. A young, screaming native gets her vagina bashed in and her head cracked open in a tribal execution. A pregnant tribeswoman is tied to a stake and pounded on the head; her baby is torn from her

body and thrown in the mud. The Americans gleefully rape a native girl. One of the reporters gets his dick cut off.

This atrocity footage is made all the more upsetting by Deodato's jittery, hand-held camera, which never seems to stop moving. He mimics Stan Brakhage's autopsy documentary, *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes,* without the emotion or intelligence. These scenes are made even more shocking by the seemingly casual inclusion of a brief montage of newsreel executions and assassinations.

Much like Deodato's landmark cannibal classic *Carnivorous, Cannibal Holocaust* leads you to expect the worst and then shows it. However, the sympathetic hero figure in *Carnivorous* gives a pea-brained emotional resonance that's lacking in *Cannibal Holocaust*'s inhumanity: For some improbable reason, you care about the downed pilot and want him to live. There was also a control to *Carnivorous* that's lacking in *Holocaust.* It's as though Deodato went progressively more berserk with each film, creating demented spectacles for their own sake, without regard for any living thing.



As in his giallo *House on the Edge of the Park,* Deodato couches the nihilism within ersatz art-movie devices and philosophical pretentiousness. Man's inhumanity to man. The primitive versus the civilized. The media's indifferent obsession with violence and snuff. Deodato's characteristic haute European pseudo-intellectual musings are tossed off in a threadbare connecting sequence, while the stomach-turning details of the torture are presented graphically. These scenes are where the director's head is really at. The only sort of human affection that emerges in *Holocaust* is when a good-looking Hispanic-type boy walks naked towards the tribe and babbles nonsense syllables as actor Rob Kerman reacts in awe.



Rob later spoke of the nightmare of being stuck in the jungle with Deodato. "The guy is a *real* sadist. He had girls crying to him." However, the nail in the coffin was when Rob saw Deodato kill a small animal. "Deodato killed a chipmunk," he recalls, still disgusted two decades later. "I was a drama major, and knew special effects. You fill a condom with blood, the animal squirms and looks uncomfortable, and you burst the condom and you can't tell on screen if it got killed or not. The animal is just a little uncomfortable for a few minutes. If you want to be nice, you give him a bath, feed him a meal, and, like any other actor, you send him on his way." But this wasn't real enough for Deodato. Rob likes animals, and is a

practicing Orthodox Jew. After witnessing the snuff, he prayed to God to punish Deodato and make the movie a flop. It says something when a director can drive an actor who's been desensitized from years in the sex industry to prayers of destruction. The stench of Deodato's immorality must have been overwhelming.

*Cannibal Holocaust* was quintessential Deuce fare that ventured into the forbidden realm. Like the rest of the Liberty's most intense Eurosleaze offerings, it branded you with its mark for having watched it.

# nine

# Bitch Goddess of the Apollo: Ilsa, Queen of Pain

**Among the plushest and quietest of the grindhouses, with comfortable opera** seats and old chandeliers, the Apollo had had a history of premiering 42nd Street's most sexually off-beat fare since the close of the 1950s, and had long attracted an introverted audience engrossed in big-screen voyeurism. Back then, the theater screened French softcore imports like Audubon Films' *Sweet Ecstasy,* as well as the pioneering sex-change fable *Glen or Glenda,* which played under the title *I Changed My Sex.* During the early 1960s, the theater developed a reputation as a quickie sex spot, although runs of several Mondo movies briefly spooked away the sexually desperate audience. By the end of the decade, however, triple-bills of sadist all-girl epics like the *Olga* series brought many an enthralled fetishist back to the Apollo.

In 1980, the Apollo had been lushly refurbished and turned into a Broadway play theater. It flopped miserably. When it returned to showing exploitation films, its face-lift made it an elegant grindhouse, a true aesthetic cut above the rest, and the staff occasionally patrolled the two balconies to keep the place from degenerating back into a quickie sex spot. Despite the renovation, you'd still see the theater's house cat. When the occasional rat or mouse ran across the stage as the curtains opened, the cat would follow, its pupils enormous in pursuit of its evening's dinner. In its own way, the cat stayed true to the Deuce's Darwinian nature.

Before all of this, during the 1970s, the Apollo was home to the *Ilsa* films, the most extreme and shocking entries in the dominant bitch-goddess exploitation genre. Ilsa is the ultimate dominatrix without mercy. To her, other women are nothing but objects to be abused and men are only around to satisfy her desires—

THE MOST DREADED NAZI OF THEM ALL!
She committed crimes so terrible ... even the SS feared her!
•A DIFFERENT KIND OF X
ILSA
She Wolf of the SS
starring
DYANNE THORNE as ILSA
WARNING: SOME MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC MAY FIND CERTAIN SCENES IN THIS FILM OFFENSIVE AND SHOCKING - the Management
THEATRE

Times Square's ultimate bitch goddess. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)

but the minute the guy loses his hard-on and begins boring her, it's curtains for his manhood. Throughout her reign of torture, Ilsa is presented in a parade of fetishistic costume situations—as a Nazi commandant, harem keeper, South American warden, Siberian ice queen. She's done it all, and none of it is pretty.

Incarnating Ilsa is Dyanne Thorne, whose experienced, steely double-D figure works well in her sadist's role, and whose flair for sublime sexual exaggeration has made her virtually inseparable from her *Ilsa* persona. Dyanne has had a long history in showbiz, dating back to nightclub sketch comedy, burlesque revues, and TV work, and like many of her fellow cast members in the *Ilsa* milieu, she had a brief run-in with Hollywood before embarking on a career in exploitation, beginning with a small walk-on in the 1961 Tony Curtis comedy, *Who Was That Lady?* One of Dyanne's first leading roles was in an obscure melodrama called *En-*

*counter,* where she plays a wicked lady who kills her husband and marries an older guy for his money. Robert De Niro, billed as "little Bobby De Niro," plays Dyanne's stepson.

In 1962, Dyanne starred in Joe Sarno's innovative sexploitationer *Sin in the Suburbs,* which coincidentally costarred another torture goddess to be, Audrey "Olga" Campbell. In 1970 Dyanne made two films starring opposite Peter Carpenter, who'd appeared in Russ Meyer's *Vixen!* (1968). In the softcore X-rated comedy *Love Me Like I Do* (1970), Dyanne and Peter play a feuding swinger couple whose mutually abusive marriage is saved after cops fire tear gas through their window. In the R-rated *Point of Terror* (1971) you get a glimmer of the beginnings of Dyanne's *Ilsa* malevolence. Peter plays a Tom Jones–like lounge singer in deep trouble. The hateful highlight is Dyanne kicking a wheelchair-bound geezer around with her high heels as she shouts "Toro!" like a bullfighter. She eventually lets him roll right into the pool and watches him drown.



Dyanne has appeared in the full gamut of exploitation genres. Using her Rosalee Stein alias, Dyanne played an oversexed hooker who gets it on with a space alien in Harry Novak's Hollywood Boulevard softcore sci-fi cheapie *Wham Bam Thank You Spaceman* (1975). In the obscure *Blood Sabbath* (1972), Dyanne's a naked witch who enjoys sacrificing her male victims, and in *The Erotic Adventures of Pinocchio* (1971), which predated other X-rated adaptations of fairy tales, she plays the Fairy Godmother. Dyanne also paid her submissive dues by having an excruciatingly embarrassing tit exam in *Chesty Anderson USN* (1976), an R-rated comedy that played to the sensibility of *Sex to Sexty,* cartoons illustrating dirty jokes intended for retired servicemen.



Dyanne has been happily married to Howard Maurer for many years. A friend introduced them and they were pen pals before tying the knot. Howard remembers when Dyanne was cast in the original *Ilsa* film: "She came home with this script, and she showed it to me. She wasn't there when I read it. I didn't like it so much I rolled it up and threw it against the wall! I was angry! And then I started to think about it . . . and said *somebody's* gonna do it, so what? What's the big deal on it? And the more I looked at it, the more I thought it was actually funny in a morbid sense. She finally agreed to do it. And that was how the whole thing came about."

Dyanne, a sweet, quiet woman, insists, "I never made an attempt to glorify my

character in any way. I read a great deal about Ilsa Koch, who really did exist, and she truly was someone nobody would want to emulate. And so in preparing that character, every character is, of course, a human being. . . . You have to give them some humanness. But I didn't try to glorify because I didn't want anyone to think it was something they were supposed to emulate. So, I think I did a good job of that because I still receive a great amount of fan mail."

The *Ilsa* films are legendary for showcasing gaggles of Hollywood Boulevard's best-known and sexiest bust models, all playing masochists to Dyanne's sultry sadist. They're sturdy, robust women built to absorb a lot of abuse without breaking easily. Pre-silicone throwbacks to 1950s big-tit fetishism, these women appeared in numerous softcore sexploitation movies, and during the height of their popularity in the 1960s and 1970s, film collector fetishists would hunt down press material for these films to groove on the overwhelmingly sexy group shots and stills. These gals had large fan followings, which helped make the *Ilsa* films hits.

One of the most striking, Uschi Digart, came to prominence in the late 1960s under the moniker "Astrid Lillimor" in Russ Meyer's *Cherry, Harry and Raquel* (1970). The prototype of the healthy, busty, dark blonde, naturalist Swede, Uschi was filmed by Meyer dancing, posing, and preening nude in the Panamint Valley desert. With the Meyer seal of approval, Uschi subsequently writhed on the torture rack in the notorious S&M costume film *Poor Cecily* (1973) and made nude walk-ons in hardcore films like *Pornography in Hollywood* (1971). Her work in exploitation films gave Uschi a huge following among adult bookstore patrons, who'd drop their quarters and unzip their flys to see loops of her and aging fellow glamazon Candy Sample frolicking with size-icon John Holmes.

Bust icon Sharon Kelly had a three-and-a-half-decade career as a natural redhead softcore star with the looks of a dream date out of an *Emerald Singles* personals ad and a yin-yang personality that married an aloof narcissism to a voracious sexuality. She was the personification of the rough, sexually aggressive Irish girl—in that mick zen way, she just *is.* Sharon has been seen in literally hundreds of films since her initial appearance on the Hollywood Boulevard scene in 1966's exploitation thriller *A Scream in the Streets.* By the time she showed up in the *Ilsa* movies, Sharon was the big-tit prom queen on the block, and absolutely ubiquitous. She appeared in everything from softcore layouts in B-level men's stoke magazines to X-rated spoofs like *The Boob Tube* (1975) to the bizarre

R-rated satire *Little Annie Fanny* on the exploitation movie fast-bed shuffle like *Alice Goodbody* (1974). Like 'em countrified? Sharon's done that, too, starring in innumerable salacious hillbilly drive-in films like *Sassy Sue* (1972) from distributor Harry Novak. (Associates of Novak during the mid-1970s were treated to the sight of the busty redhead perched atop the aged Novak's lap, as his wig slid around.) Sharon had ultimate validation as a bust model by appearing as SuperCherry in Russ Meyer's *Supervixens* (1975). After all this, Sharon was thrown a few bones by the major studios, which cast her in small nude roles in *Hustle* and *Shampoo* (both 1975) during the period when Hollywood movies were capitalizing on cameos by widely recognized X performers. By the end of the 1970s, however, the soft-X or hard-R movies at which Sharon excelled were supplanted by hardcore. To keep on working, she took the step down to porno.

For *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* (1975), producer David Friedman borrowed the basic "softcore stars as victims of Nazi sadists" formula from Bob Cresse's runaway 1969 hit *Love Camp 7.* Aware of the intrinsic commercial value of Nazi fetish films, Friedman would marry their sadomasochistic sexploitation elements with the gore genre he'd innovated with *Blood Feast,* thus creating a spectacle that *truly* offered something for everyone. With a canny sense of his audience, Friedman knew that such a film would hit big if a busty sexpot played the lead Nazi, and if she had equally vicious female henchwomen.

To direct *Ilsa,* Friedman hired Don Edmonds, who had built up the right mix of professionalism and grizzle. Edmonds had started out as an actor in such epitomes of innocuous fare as *Gidget Goes Hawaiian* and TV shows like *Petticoat Junction* and *The Interns.* By the end of the 1960s, however, Edmonds was directing softcore porn films, including the notorious *Wild Honey* (1970) about girls getting the fast-bed shuffle in Hollywood. Notably, *Wild Honey* includes scenes of a satanic orgy where Uschi Digart is perched next to a man reading *Mein Kampf.*

Lee Hessel's Cambist distributed *Ilsa* in New York. Cambist was notable for its extreme and widely shown product, including risqué fare like *Cry Uncle!,* early Scandinavian imports like *1001 Danish Delights,* and the sexy Eurosleaze classic *Vampyres* (see chapter 8). *Ilsa* announced her presence on the film scene with a hard-hitting and graphic ad campaign, a fetish bonbon of hate. Behind a caricature of Dyanne as Ilsa were stills of her two stern, blonde ass-kicking assistants, with drawings of women strung up behind them for extra oomph. The ad pro-

claimed the film "a different kind of X." Another roadshow touch in *Ilsa*'s campaign was a warning that the film could be "offensive to *some* members of the public."

*Ilsa* exploded onto the Apollo screen backed by a dull old World War II spy import called *Probability Zero.* Proving Friedman right, *Ilsa* immediately became a box office bonanza, with full-page ads in *Variety* heralding its financial success. *Playboy* found the movie vulgar, but true to their hypocritical philosophy, the magazine's *Sex in the Cinema* pocket book series printed a still from the film. *Adam Film World,* a magazine aimed at die-hard worshippers of Hollywood bust models, devoted a long photo spread homage to *Ilsa.*

Unequalled in explicit sex, violence, and bad taste, *Ilsa* is loosely based on real-life war criminal Ilsa Koch. The movie opens with a written disclaimer from producer "Herman Träger" (Friedman) as a voice-over of Hitler delivering an impassioned speech plays on the soundtrack. The sole credit is the film's title, in threatening Germanic script. A velour hard-simulation extravaganza starts things off as a mature, shapely blonde humps a man in bed. When the man eventually passes out from pleasure, an aggravated, unsatisfied Ilsa awakens him with her two blonde assistants on backup. "No man will *ever* sleep with another woman after sleeping with me!" declares Ilsa. The tough bitch assistants drag their boss's bedmate off to an operating table, where Ilsa herself delivers the final solution to his balls, killing him in the process. "I told you that you'd never have to go back to the camp," she smirks as he dies in agony.

Cut to a flatbed truck carrying a bunch of frightened-looking actresses clad in a mixed jumble of 1940s prop-store wear. From this dour opening the tone is set.

Ilsa greets the prisoners by reassuring them that she's a doctor there to help them and that her camp is no Dachau. After a strip-and-examination scene, male prisoners arrive, and the female dominance becomes vivid. A blond Aryan catches Ilsa's eye. He's a German-born American caught up in the war because he was studying in der Fatherland. "I'm German through no fault of my own," he defiantly informs Ilsa. She has a guard butt him in the stomach with a rifle. Ilsa verbally demeans and threatens the men, makes them disrobe, and mocks the size of their cocks.

Ilsa has a set of theories and delights in proving them. She supervises her two assistants as they whip a male and a female prisoner to death to prove her hy-

pothesis that a "well-trained woman can withstand pain longer than a man." The couple is led nude to a filthy room with blood on the walls. They're jammed into upper-body pillories built like half barrels, their hands and heads fastened in place by wooden locks. Ilsa's assistants anticipate the exertion in their upcoming duty, and go topless so as not to drench their starched white shirts in sweat. Their bare chests are immaculately oiled. The assistants produce enormous bullwhips and begin flogging the couple relentlessly. Sharon Kelly writhes in agony after begging Ilsa for mercy. Her whining only increases Ilsa's hatred. Sharon dies a few seconds after the male, and Ilsa uses this fact to support her female-supremacy statistics. The room's walls are covered with more blood. The couple's bodies are strung up upside down the next day for all to see, the corpses covered with whip marks.

Eventually Ilsa calls upon Wolf, the blonde Aryan prisoner, to come to her bedroom. She wants to see if he's white enough to keep up with her, and, sure enough, he is. He has the porno star's gift of complete ejaculatory and erectile control—he can keep it up not only with Ilsa, but with her two demanding assistants as well. The foursome ball with a red SS flag hanging over the bed, in a real *Men's Adventure* "I Was with Three Aryan Bitch Goddesses and Lived!" scene. Ilsa has found herself a perfect pet.

Having satisfied herself sexually, Ilsa gets back to work with a slobbering mess of a white-coated doctor right out of *Mom and Dad.* Ilsa methodically goes about her experiments. Uschi Digart, in a silent role, writhes topless in a decompression chamber. One unfortunate prisoner is scalded to death as the screen turns bloody red. Anna, a prisoner on the outs with Ilsa from the beginning, is caught trying to escape, and so becomes the object of a series of hideous tortures that reduce her to a barely living bloody pulp, kept alive only enough to feel the pain.

A Nazi general decides to visit, accompanied by a blond henchman and various aides. Ilsa orders the girls to slap a fresh face on the camp, and women in smocks are dominated as they do cleansing chores. Edward Roehm, a frequent fixture of such L.A. sleaze as the blaxploitation film *The Candy Tangerine Man,* plays the general. He's billed as "Wolfgang" Roehm here, and gives a cartoonish beer-stein-hoisting performance. Ilsa leads the general through her horror chamber of gangrene infections and rotting female flesh, then honors him with a dinner

Ilsa performing a sexual attack. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)

in which a nude prisoner is hung by piano wire as an ice block melts beneath her feet. It's one of the film's truly sadistic scenes.

Loosened up by Ilsa's homage, the general has his private session with her. "You are like an ice goddess," he declares as she smiles. She begins to remove her top. "No, no." The boots? "No, not the boots. The britches. Ilsa, there is but one way! *Piss on me!*"

The next morning, the general leaves as officiously as he came. Ilsa's Aryan boy toy Wolf hears that the Allies are about to come, so he sets in motion the prisoners' revolt. This time, as foreplay for his nightly bed session with Ilsa, he ties her to the bed. Outside, the handful of prisoners and a few extras in German soldier prop-store threads have a dramatic, slow-motion gun battle. As Ilsa squirms helpless and bound, Anna, the prisoner she had reduced to a barely mobile bloody pulp, crawls towards her holding a knife. She collapses dead atop Ilsa. The

general's blond henchman shows up. Ilsa thinks her fellow Nazi is going to save her, but instead he blows her brains out and reports back to the general that there will be no evidence of the torture camp for the Allies to find. By satisfying the general's freaky scene, Ilsa signed her own death warrant and became a disposable toy, the same as any of her own female victims.

The movie ends as Wolf and a girl he's rescued hold each other while surveying the carnage.

*Ilsa, She Wolf* works because it's played straight, even if the actors occasionally speak with bad accents. Nazi paraphernalia is manipulated with loving fetishism, and the old *Hogan's Heroes* set used as Ilsa's death camp provides an appropriately deviant touch. Plus, there's the built-in apprehension factor inherent in viewing *Ilsa:* When would the sadism cease being erotic and start sickening the viewer?

After a remarkable six-month run at the Apollo, *Ilsa* was farmed out for runs in outer-borough grindhouses throughout New York, including downtown Brooklyn and Staten Island's rowdy St. George Theater.



The following year, *Ilsa, Harem Keeper of the Oil Sheiks* (1976) offered a low camp spin on the S&M/violence formula of the previous film. Howard recalls how the first film's success positioned Dyanne for the sequel: "Once it became a hit, when they approached her on the second one, I said, 'You better find yourself an agent to negotiate this thing.' And no one would come back at her after all these calls she made. So I said, 'Ya know, what? I've been agenting for myself for years.' I put the first and second [*Ilsa* film] deals together, and the third. We did very well on the films. It was amazing, that when one contract was signed, and it was talked about in the trades, suddenly all those agents she was snubbed by suddenly called back. We told 'em it was too late. The deal *was* done."



Dyanne, however, felt that *Ilsa, She Wolf* typecast her, causing people to hold the villainess persona against her. "Agents wouldn't represent me on anything in the future, 'cause of the SS thing. It's ironic how people are. They can't separate the character from the person. It was held against me." Even more ironic is that an actress also known as Rosalie Stein was cast in the most anti-Semitic female role ever conceived.



*Ilsa, Harem Keeper* sets up an interesting "filthiest couple alive" situation as Ilsa works as the henchwoman of El Sharif, the slimy leader of an oil-rich Arab na-

tion, overseeing his harem slaves. Ilsa's crack assistants are two lithe, scantily clad soul sisters played by blaxploitation foxes Tanya Boyd (of *Black Shampoo*) and Marilyn Joi (of director Edmonds's *Tender Loving Care*). Both add a more exotic flavor.

A helicopter drops off three wooden boxes in the desert. Ilsa orders them taken to El Sharif's palace, where the crates are opened to reveal nude women outfitted in locked, heart-shaped chastity belts. After shooting the women up to wake them from their snufflike poses, Ilsa places them in giant birdcages and reveals their new purpose: to be members of El Sharif's harem. Sassy redhead Sharon Kelly hollers brashly, "You'll never get away with it!" and is menaced by a gerbil in a cage. That shuts her up. A dour-looking Uschi Digart plays one of the captives, looking every bit the bodacious yet frumpy Swedish housewife.

El Sharif is overjoyed when Ilsa announces that the cargo has arrived. The surprise dash of Tobasco here is actor "Victor Alexander" as El Sharif. Hiding under a moniker that sounds like a mixed drink, and wearing more makeup than his female costars (because, notes Howard Maurer, "He didn't want anyone to know it was him!"), is celebrity skin Spalding Gray, giving a hilariously overbaked performance. At this time, Gray was also starring in a run of hard-X movies like *The Farmer's Daughter* before achieving mainstream success.

Meanwhile, Ilsa's black henchwomen catch a beer-bellied soldier with a harem girl. They wrestle him down, knock out his teeth, and rip off his balls. A Nazi doctor prepares a group of girls for a slave auction by applying prosthetics to their wounds in an exam room that looks like a dominance dungeon. As the slave auction gets under way, the bidders include some black men who look uncannily like 1990s rap singers. One girl is purchased and her teeth are knocked out to accommodate a sheik who gets off on gum jobs exclusively.

The new girls dutifully perform while training. "The tongue is his favorite instrument," says Ilsa. Uschi gets a whack with a riding crop as Ilsa demands she give head to another girl. "LICK IT!" she orders. The charred bones of an escaped harem girl are thrown at a terrorized Sharon Kelly to keep her in line. Occasionally, Ilsa goes to a sewer grate in the ground, where she drops bits of food down to El Sharif's nephew, the rightful heir to the throne, whom El Sharif keeps conveniently out of sight and behind bars, with Ilsa's help.

During the 1960s, the exotic Eurasian actress Haji was worshipped for her

spitfire roles in bust-king Russ Meyer's *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* and *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls.* Here, she plays a spy, a belly dancer who becomes the focal point of a lengthy interrogation sado-snuff sequence after she's caught with a listening device concealed in her belly-button jewel. Ilsa and her vicious assistants put Haji's tits in a press and have poison ants gnaw away her leg. Finally, Ilsa instructs her man El Sharif to step behind the viewing partition for a surprise, then wheels in Haji, barely alive on a gyno gurney. In a truly jaw-dropping bit of ingenuity, she's killed by a plastic-explosive diaphragm Ilsa has inserted, triggered by a mechanized dildo, creating a bloody mess. El Sharif is startled and turned on at his evil honey's vicious handiwork, but then Ilsa tops it all off by having him open each of the new prisoners' heart-shaped chastity belts with an ornate key. Spalding swoons in overamped ecstasy, pondering each revealed vagina in a scene so funny it's worth the price of admission.

Fife-and-drum music introduces the American stud, an aide to Kaiser, a Henry Kissinger parody (played by Edward Roehm, the general in the first *Ilsa* movie). Kaiser is treated as the comic relief, with a few then-topical jokes about the 1970s energy crisis tossed in. Kaiser's been sent by the U.S. to persuade El Sharif to release more oil, but El Sharif instead delights in rattling the famous diplomat's cage. For starters, El Sharif has a servant's hand cut off in front of the horrified Kaiser. Kaiser goes on at length to his aide how much he despises sheep's eye, an Arab delicacy, then El Sharif secretly feeds him Haji's eye during an honorary feast. Other touches include El Sharif's sending a young boy to Kaiser's bedroom. "El Sharif says you do not want a woman." It's an offer Kaiser doesn't refuse.

Ilsa falls hard for the clean-cut American stud, wrapping herself neck to toe in a lace body stocking to seduce him. As soon as Ilsa gets a wandering eye, El Sharif goes nuts with jealousy. He wants her to kill the American immediately, but she keeps putting off the job. Ilsa's passive aggression finally prompts El Sharif to punish her by stripping her and tying her up while a filthy homeless beggar paws and licks her, as El Sharif and his soldiers look on in voyeuristic delight.

Eventually Ilsa kills El Sharif by ordering a slave girl implanted with an explosive diaphragm to fuck him as he's helplessly bound and gagged. Meanwhile, the American rescues El Sharif's grateful nephew, who is reinstated to his proper place on the throne. Mr. America really fucked Ilsa to fuck her over—the dominatrix's ultimate nightmare. In the film's most chilling scene, Ilsa is left in the hole

from which the little boy has been saved, screaming a bloodcurdling "Go to hell!" as the kid turns the tables, dropping scraps of food down through spaces between the bars, as she had to him. Treating her like a torture pet, the little boy looks like a young Fatty Arbuckle, and is frighteningly realistic in his hate of Dyanne. To be sure, the use of a small kid in this role is a shock in itself.

*Ilsa, Harem Keeper* plays out a sadistic inclination that turns operatically terminal. The film displays a velour aesthetic in the literal sense; Royal purple is the dominant color—the soldiers wear purple burnooses, El Sharif reclines in a purple chaise lounge. But such stylistics don't mask the violent intent. The female playthings get systemically torn apart and killed; being shot is the most humane fate for any of them.

"Definitely strange stuff went on with extras," recalled Howard, who got a

"Victor Alexander" (Spalding Gray) as El Sharif gets shrimped in *Ilsa, Harem Keeper of the Oil Sheiks*. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)

kick out of being on the set, enjoying watching his wife play Ilsa. "They were just so happy to be there 20 hours a day! There was an auction scene on the auction block, and one girl, after the scene was over, she became a little bit . . . they didn't get enough money for her! [*laughs*]. She took it seriously! The girl went bonkers! [*laughs*]. I played one of the oil sheiks at the auction. The girl who got mad was the girl who has her teeth knocked out. That sheik who bought her was my cohort."

*Ilsa, Harem Keeper* ran at *two* Times Square grindhouses. You had your choice of seeing it on the Deuce at the Apollo Theater, or over on Broadway and 47th Street at the Cinerama Theater, where it was running with the bloodlusting *Vampyres: Daughters of Dracula.*

As the 1970s drew to a close, Cambist became inactive as an exploitation film distributor. Mutated versions of the *Ilsa* movies, edited by regional subdistributors, floated around. For years, there were two *Ilsa, She Wolf*s—one just with the graphic sex, one with the violence. *Harem Keeper* was also circulated in an edited version that toned down the extremes of both sex and violence.







The *Ilsa* films were box office smashes in Europe, where their distributor was Erwin Dietrich, a Swiss producer known for women's prison movies. Ever the shyster, Dietrich wanted to cash in on the *Ilsa* bonanza by concocting his own spin-off, again using Dyanne Thorne as the lead. In an apt bit of hiring, Dietrich picked the indefatigable Jesse Franco to direct. As his Eurosex films demonstrated time and again, Franco consistently knew how to flabbergast viewers with his imaginative reworkings of the women's prison genre. Even more importantly, Franco and his longtime wife Lina Romay were unafraid of *Ilsa*'s cinematic heritage. Jesse and Lina approached the Dietrich project with the spirit of Tijuana live sex show performers and would leave *Ilsa* whimpering like a whipped dog.

Franco's effort, *Wanda, the Wicked Warden,* was released on the Deuce by Aquarius in 1977. Heralded by a bondage pulp-paperback-style ad campaign, *Wanda* also became known under the moniker of *Ilsa the Wicked Warden.* Jesse and Lina's personalities dominate the movie, and relegate Dyanne Thorne to a sidecar in her own vehicle. Dyanne later disowned the film, claiming that Franco had "talked me into things" and "filmed rehearsals without my knowledge." She took particular umbrage to the scene where her character—the evil director of a South American prison-clinic for women—asphyxiates a female prisoner by put-

ting a plastic bag over her head. The beef between Dyanne and Franco probably also has to do with the quality of her performance, which involves a lot of eyeball-rolling under a bad short brown wig intended to make her look Latina—the final straw to the breaking of her Aryan image. The ultimate blow, though, was Franco's casting of his wife as the terroristic prison dyke, upstaging Dyanne at her own game.

One scene in *Wanda* always had the 42nd Street audience rolling. After eating a putrid plate of prison slop, Lina takes a fat shit, then poises her ass and commands another inmate to "lick my *culo.*" Another scene, reminiscent of a demented peep-booth loop, features Dyanne sticking pins in Lina's tits before locking her in a passionate lesbian embrace. While *Wanda* wasn't Franco at his best, it still had something to offer the Deuce's desperate torture freaks and scat fanciers, and so wound up playing for years, through the sheer force of its graphic content and the box office catnip of Dyanne's name and reputation.

Finally, Canada produced its own knockoff in *Ilsa, Tigress of Siberia* (1977), the least-seen and dullest of the series. It's a dreary example of what exploitation spinoffs can result in, a xerox twenty times removed from the original. The budget seems to have gone for locations and costumes, with no imagination given to the torture sequences.

In *Ilsa, Tigress of Siberia,* Dyanne's Ilsa character is running a Soviet gulag where she feeds prisoners to a tiger and dunks them in ice water for kicks. Shockingly, two lard-bellied, bearded men serve as her assistants, not the usual enticing female duo. The producers even distort Ilsa's sex life into a dirge of boredom, sandwiched between the two tubs. Ilsa becomes frustrated and obsesses over breaking a male anti-Stalinist who refuses to ball her. As she's about to feed him to a tiger, the prison is destroyed by revolutionaries.

Cut to years later. Thorne is the madam of a Montreal brothel. The anti-Stalinist is part of the visiting Russian Olympic team, whose members show up at her whorehouse for sexual relief between games. Ilsa's ego is still bruised from our hero's past sexual rejection, so she kidnaps him and puts him in an AstroTurf torture chamber. He's saved at the end in a half-assed imitation James Bond rescue scene.

Although she's as striking as ever, Thorne isn't addressed as "Ilsa" even once in the bad post-synced dialogue, and is left to strike a few familiar scowls. The

whole thing is a tired, made-for-cable simulated-sex exercise. Half the fun of the *Ilsa* movies is in their juicy female supporting cast. Here, there is none.

Twenty-five years after the *Ilsa* films were made, the world has caught up to their intensity. *She Wolf* and *Harem Keeper* director Don Edmonds proved to be a fine director on a low budget, and went on to attain legitimate validation as executive producer of Quentin Tarantino's script *True Romance,* the popular Hollywood movie based on the exploitation geometry of relentless sex, violence, and revenge. He also made the pilot episode of the TV series *Silk Stalkings.*

Today, Dyanne and Howard remain happily married. As ordained ministers, they operate a wedding service in Las Vegas, and would do another *Ilsa* sequel if the money was right. Every so often, when her husband can convince her, Dyanne fluffs up her blonde wig and heads to Chiller Theatre type conventions, where Madam signs autographs and answers questions *that are within reason.* The new wrinkle Dyanne has noticed is that females are now a large segment of her audience, probably as a result of *Xena: Warrior Princess,* and other films with aggressive heroines. As Ilsa marches into the 21st century, she's been rightfully iconized as the ultimate female anti-hero.

# ten

# Peeking on Female Rough Trade at the Harris

**An especially dark and foreboding grindhouse, the Harris Theater was parked next** door to 42nd Street's only all-male bathhouse, the New Barracks, whose client overflow made the Harris home to a steady population of sleepers and pickpockets. These jaded Deuce denizens were predatory, victimizing each other when no tourists were handy. The Harris had the distinction of being one of the few grindhouses where even the area's toughest Hispanic junkie hustlers would wake up with cut pockets and missing money after nodding out. The theater had a dank, musty odor, with a vague smell of urine and spilled soda that was no doubt enhanced by the steamy proximity of the bathhouse next door. The basic fixtures were worn out at best, decayed at worst.

World-weary Times Square homosexuals came into the Harris to feed off the nervous energy of the horny heteros who ventured to one of Manhattan's most intense streets and one of its most menacing theaters to watch the female rough-trade movies that played here. What made the risk worthwhile for these worshipful fetishists were the larger-than-life projections of their innermost secret fantasies on the stained Harris screen. You'd plop down in one of the springy seats and suddenly you weren't in the concrete jungle but in a hot, sunny climate, peeking on sexy, aggressive women in halter tops, their midriffs bared.

A handful of these films were made around the New York area, but the majority emerged from California, and some were produced abroad in sweaty tropical climates like the Philippines. Their stars included such sassy athletic blondes as Roberta Collins, Tiffany Bolling, and Candice Rialson. These gritty, threatening young girls were always scheming, conning, stealing, or in flight. Inevitably, they'd

find themselves behind bars, or in cages. But they were up to the challenge. They had to be. Life had dealt them shitty cards.

New York's homegrown rough-trade goddess, brassy blonde Cheri Caffaro, was the cherry bomb creation of two Manhattan theater managers, Don Schain and his pal Ralph Desiderio. In 1970, Don conceived of the *Ginger* series with the idea of "taking a female character and putting her in a role that was traditionally reserved for a man." Don and Ralph found most of their cast in New York through ads in *Variety* and *The Hollywood Reporter,* but it was at an L.A. casting session that Don met Cheri. She was grizzled enough to take the heat without looking slutty or beat out, giving her an aggressive, athletic, competitive sex appeal. Cheri had won a Brigitte Bardot look-alike contest as a teenager. Don knew he'd met his Ginger. She'd ultimately become his wife.

*Ginger* had a memorable newspaper ad campaign with the tag line "GINGER. Her weapon is her body. She can kill you, cut you or cure you," appearing over a photo of a half-undressed Cheri on a bed, pointing a gun. The film was a Harris fave after its initial premiere in 1971 at the Astor Theater on Broadway. Snazzy thriller music plays over a lengthy credit sequence that features an endless shot of Ginger driving down the New Jersey Turnpike. The thorough credits mention everyone from Caffaro's hairdresser to "Miss Caffaro's knits by . . ." We see credits for Ralph's brothers Anthony, Edward, and Paul, who helped with the production, and the Desiderio family's Jersey car dealership, Derio Oldsmobile, supplied the cars used in the film. The *Ginger* series was a family affair all around.

When the credits finally finish, Ginger drives up to the office of the P.I. she works for, Jason Varone (the extremely likeable William Grannel). He's a pervy Italian who looks like he'd run a hot-sheet hotel. With his distinct New Yawkese, Jason plays out an entertaining pre–*Charlie's Angels* setup, laying out the target of Ginger's assignment: Rex Halsey, a smart-ass tough kid who thinks of himself as a pretty boy. He's running a sex and drug ring out of a house around Asbury Park, to the annoyance of his neighbors. Rex takes advantage of rich kids. The parents want him stopped before the police get involved.

Rex and his gang are seen in what looks like the basement rec room of a rented Jersey Shore house, complete with a bad motel oil painting of a nautical scene. In his black choker necklace, Rex is about as threatening as a hairdresser. His rich kid cohort Rodney is played by Casey Donovan (aka Calvin Culver), a gay

Cheri Caffaro gets her marching orders while sunbathing. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)

porn star who was popular when *Ginger* was released. Rodney bitches that Rex just isn't giving him the thrills he was after. They come across like two queens having a gripe session. There's a token black dope pusher who amuses Rex by saying how he has the hots for one of his white girl customers. They strategize a drug/sex blackmail scheme, with three backup girls acquiescing just to get the arguing over with.

Ginger infiltrates Rex's gang by doing a sexy, sleazy bar dance. After she's in, Rex's three henchwomen try to beat her down on a cold, deserted beach. The ensuing catfight ends with Ginger leaving a girl nude and bound in her own bikini. That'll teach the bitch. At this point the soul of the movie comes out. It has a voyeur's eye for heterosexual kinks, a camera lens that stares and won't stop. Ginger befriends a girl who Rex had addicted to dope, and shares an amorous beachside moment with her. The girl is found murdered shortly thereafter with a bag over her head, so Ginger's out for blood.

The movie bursts alive in extended segments that resemble peep-booth footage. A man with a bad toupee gets a blow job from a girl he can't stop calling beautiful. Ginger's boss, Jason, gets in on the action himself, phoning one of Rex's outcall girls, handcuffing her to the bed, and extracting info from her. He goes full frontal nude, albeit shadowed—a little something for the ladies in the audience. A rich white girl hooked on smack goes to the black pusher's run-down ghetto

shack and has the balls to scream at the dude, "You made me go all the way to niggertown, now give me my fix!"—a line that had the Harris audience falling off their chairs. When the dealer demands sex from the needy junkie, the movie turns as raunchy and graphic as any mixed-combo movie playing in Times Square, stopping just short of hardcore.

Eventually, Ginger focuses in and starts picking off Rex's troublemaking druggie gang one by one. She ties Rodney naked to the bed in one of the first widely seen male full frontal nude scenes, and makes him spill the beans on his crimes by tightening piano wire around his balls. In the process, Ginger—who was orphaned in a tragic accident—has a bitter flashback of the time a middle-aged man gave her a cocktail, telling her, "You have to pretend to be in love with women like you to fuck them." This scenario broke her heart and burnt her ass, so when Rodney unwisely shouts during her flashback "You dirty, prickteasing bitch!" Ginger slices his balls off, making him explode in a bloodcurdling scream. Next, Ginger corners the black pusher and taunts him with the jeer of "hey black boy" over and over. Her mind reels back again to her teenage innocence, shattered when she was gang raped by a group of black men. Ginger shoots the no-good pusher dead as he goes for his gun.





Rex is quite perturbed that Ginger has crumpled his crime pyramid, knocking off his key players. He pouts, overpowers Ginger and ties her to a bed, and shoots her full of heroin. It's a fun kink-and-drug party, if consensual, and you suspect throughout the film that Ginger and Rex want their moment together. Rex bids her adieu with the put-down, "All you ever wanted was a man who wore the pants. So long, Ginger," before running into a hail of police bullets.

On a private airstrip, Ginger admits to Jason that she "got her hang-ups out of her system." Beaming with delight, he promises to call her for another interesting case.

*Ginger* delivers the goods, offering the audience a color wheel of kinky situations revolving around female dominance. Nude rope bondage, catfights, sex-slave girls, and rough mixed-combo action all fly at the viewer, yet the movie very slyly avoids hardcore. Schain instinctively knew that actual sex would distract from the high-voltage fetish situations that the film depicts. The interior sets and Jersey exteriors add to the sleaziness. While the film was met with complete critical scorn, audience members typically went back to *Ginger* two or three times.

The film climbed to third place on *Variety*'s fifty top-grossing list in 1971, remaining on the list for many months.

The most compelling aspect of *Ginger* is its uniquely aggressive female heroine. Obviously gay actors playing straights surround Ginger, accentuating her dominant qualities. The hidden nugget of truth within the film (and the other *Ginger* films that followed) lies in its deft psychological portrayal of a woman who plays out leftover sexual rage in the same vicious criminal universe that had hurt her earlier in life. Someone's gonna pay, and Ginger uses lowlifes to work out her neurosis; simultaneously, she cleans up crime with the macho bluster of Dirty Harry.

Don remembers that Cheri was a little nervous about appearing in the film, which was promoted like porno chic even though it wasn't hardcore, with Cheri doing eye-popping publicity stunts like giving interviews in the nude. As Don remembers, "I think on some levels Cheri liked being Ginger. She got quite a lot of attention. We went to a number of places around the country for her to sign autographs in person in local theaters. Once she did a Ginger look-alike contest at a drive-in and the picture broke the house record for quite a while. The grand prize was a trip to Hollywood."

A sequel was only logical, and the next *Ginger* film, *The Abductors* (1972), has the meanest sadomasochistic streak of the series. Thugs kidnap three cheerleaders (including *Last House on the Left*'s Jeramie Rain) and deliver them to a high-class white-slave operation run by Jablon (Patrick Wright). Wright's casting fit the whole rough RDF torture-loop aesthetic, where the punishment for the women includes violation by brutes. The rest of the kidnappers have the requisite dark, swarthy look, including Ron Skideri (of early Amero/Findlay movies).

Jablon terrifies the kidnapped girls by pulling open a curtain, revealing a girl wearing only underpants, bound and suspended in a glass booth. He makes the horrified girls strip and hand over their panties in an act of submission, then brutally grabs at the humiliated girls, twisting their tits. One of them won't break, so he rapes her.

Jason Varone sends Ginger off to rescue the poor cheerleaders. This time, Ginger's aided by expert submissive Carter Winston (Jennifer Brooks), and Jason gives both of them electronic tracking devices, which they swallow. Of course, as they pursue Jablon, both are captured and tied up. Carter kicks Jablon right in his

balls and he kicks her back in the pussy. The homing devices bring a SWAT team to save the day, among them none other than *Deep Throat*'s notorious star Harry Reems, billed here under his real name, Herb Streicher. Even though he's only on screen for a few seconds, and is without his usual mustache, Harry was such a 42nd Street icon that Harris viewers shouted, "Hey! It's Harry Reems!" At the conclusion of this opus, Jason delivers Ginger the ironic punchline: After the cheerleaders were rescued from their bondage as high-class hookers, they weren't really interested in going home again.

*The Abductors* is the fastest-paced, most action-packed and aesthetically perfect of the *Ginger* movies. The S&M iconography is nonstop: There's bondage, discipline, male/female fighting, sexual slavery—the whole tasty platter. Exposition is kept minimal and effective, with each kink tableau propelling the film forward. The movie was shot mostly around northern New Jersey, and it has a great insular, nighttime feel that adds to its power.



The final *Ginger* film, *Girls Are for Loving* (1973), was made on a considerably higher budget than its two predecessors. It opens with the abduction of a nude couple in the freezing snow. While the woman is tied to a tree and shot to death, the man is brought to a sunny pool where he's bound, interrogated, and finally also shot to death by arch villainess Ronnie St. Claire (Jocelyne Peters). Ginger gets the urgent call from Jason as she's enjoying some bedroom wrestling and karate with her boyfriend. Jason tells her it's a high-profile, CIA-connected case involving gangsters, the government, and the corporate rip-off of a Japanese businessman. He adds that she might have to go to bed with people. "I like to fuck a lot!" she replies, as Jason rolls his eyes knowingly.



What ensues is a battle of the broads between Ginger and Ms. St. Claire, with highlights like a high-heel bikini chase through the streets of St. Thomas. Ginger electroshock-tortures two of Ronnie's men, who are suspended nude, with wires clipped to their genitals. Ginger eventually gets strapped down by Ronnie but triumphantly turns the tables on her, in the end offering the rape-ready Ronnie to the Japanese businessmen she'd almost conned.



The standout sequence in *Girls Are for Loving* is a long nightclub act featuring Cheri crooning and performing a feather dance. The scene is shot with so much affection that you *know* it was created by someone enamored with her. In-

deed, Don had married Cheri just after *The Abductors,* and this was a little romantic valentine to her.

Don and Cheri remained married coworkers for about ten years. Don recalled, "There are probably pluses and minuses working with your wife. At the time, the pluses outweighed the minuses. Cheri had hoped the *Ginger* series and its success would lead to other parts for her. And it didn't." Ultimately, Don and Cheri divorced. Today, remarried, he's a successful producer of TV movies, and hasn't spoken to Cheri in a decade. Cheri's last appearance in showbiz was as a voice in an episode of the animated *Extreme Ghostbusters* TV series.

On the West Coast, Tiffany Bolling was a brassy blonde of the old school who incarnated the California rough-trade ideal. Tiffany's first uncredited appearance was back in the late 1960s in the Frank Sinatra thriller *Tony Rome,* and in Arthur Marks's *Bonnie's Kids* (1973) she plays the older sister of white-trash scam artists. In general, her characters are often saddled with less-than-bright male cohorts, who frequently cause her to get shot in the back for her trouble. Her strongest performance is as one of a degenerate troika of kidnappers in *The Candy Snatchers* (1974). Few films have achieved a thicker sense of evil, depicting in a painfully graphic manner the worst behavior of which humans are capable. Its professional cinematic execution and sick narrative twists only make the whole scenario more believable.

The movie opens as Candy, a 14-year-old Catholic schoolgirl (played by twenty-something Susan Sennett), walks with a nun. While the credits unfold, a horridly lyrical, country-rock-flavored theme song intones, "Money is the root of all happiness." Improbably, the innocent Candy hitches a ride home and is abducted by a trio of creeps, one female wearing joke-store disguises. Before the credits are over, the screaming Candy is bound and slapped around the van.

The trio drag Candy to their L.A. hillside hideout, where they bury her alive with just an air tube to suck on to survive. The criminals aren't too bright and haven't done their homework. Assuming Candy's dad is a wealthy jewelry dealer, Tiffany Bolling bribes a black morgue worker for a spare ear, which they plan to send to him, to prove they mean business. The Afro'd worker does an impromptu rap to Tiffany about the value of different body parts and then praises cadavers as the least troublesome humans. When the kidnappers pass the ear to extract the

ransom, however, their intended target reveals that he isn't Candy's father after all; he's actually her stepdad, and married Candy's alcoholic mother only because Candy stands to inherit $2 million when she turns 21. If something happens to poor Candy before then, he gets half of the windfall. In one of the film's most chilling moments, he actually thanks the kidnappers.

As the main narrative keeps tightening the screws, there's an unbearable subplot about an abused, mute, autistic little boy with abusive white-trash parents. The only witness to the crime, he manages to remove Candy's blindfold, but can't tell anyone that she's buried.

The trio begins quarreling among themselves about killing Candy. As the little autistic kid hides and watches, one skeevy kidnapper rapes Candy, rationalizing that "she shouldn't die a virgin." Absolutely convincing, this scene rates with the most appalling ever in exploitation movies.

The shock ending of *The Candy Snatchers* will leave your blood running cold. The three kidnappers turn on each other, and Tiffany is shot in the back in a gunfight with an accomplice. Ben Piazza, playing the kidnapper who has a pedophilic interest in Candy, goes to dig her up. He is shot dead by the little autistic boy. Candy is left to die underground, as the sound of her gasping for air grows hellishly loud on the soundtrack. The grizzled Harris audience exited like small, shaken children.



While Tiffany Bolling had a special gift for creating a palpable ruthlessness, Sharon Kelly's sweetness always shone through her characters' criminality, and her buxom physicality and aggressive agreeability made her a fave of many. No actress better personified the friendly, sassy, fun-loving, white-trash Irish redhead. Coming from adult films (whose viewers knew her as Colleen Brennan) Sharon brought her considerable fan base to the Harris, whose audiences were overjoyed to see their Emerald Queen in such absolute fetish tableaux without the reality of hardcore sex shattering their fantasies. As her work in the *Ilsa* films proved (see chapter 9), Sharon didn't just take it, but could dish it out, too.

Sharon is especially eroticized in an ultra low-budget gem of girl gang sadomasochism, *The Dirty Dolls* (1974). After its initial brief appearance on the Deuce, the movie reappeared at the Harris in 1984 as the supporting feature to Tom De Simone's *The Concrete Jungle.* Although a decade older than the top bill

and far less slick, *The Dirty Dolls* packaged a bigger sexual wallop, provoking erections in the many Kelly fans who packed the house.

*The Dirty Dolls* was shot in L.A. back alleys and rented houses. Its narrative centers around a tense sexual situation and is brought to life in a quintessentially sleazy manner. Sharon is a member of a girl robbery gang led by unstable, macho Johnny (softcore leading man John Alderman, who's all skin, bone, mustache, and gooseflesh), the brother of one of the girls. (The film's poster hammered this latter point home with a caricature of the four slutty leading ladies over sex scene stills, one of which bears the tagline, "He even did it to his own sister!") During a bungled diamond heist, two office workers are kidnapped. While the girls use the hostages for sexual relief, Johnny panics and becomes increasingly unglued.

Sharon has the most erotic presence of all the performers, standing out from the usual West Coast gang of tramps as the sweetest of the rough-trade foursome. Throughout the movie, she proudly parades around in halter tops, barefoot with her dungarees rolled up at the cuff. One of her jobs is to feed the male kidnap victim his lunch, and she makes no attempt to hide her attraction for the doomed guy. Suddenly, like a white-trash wet dream burst to giant screen life, off goes the halter and a topless, gregarious Sharon gives the horny victim a well-earned blow job.

*The Dirty Dolls* so thoroughly defies any sort of normal standards of filmmaking that it's a bewilderment of riches. The dialogue is unintentionally hilarious, the lighting is as loud as the hysterically pitched overacting, and the seat-of-the-pants camera placement reeks of a weekend shooting schedule. The sex scenes are throwbacks to heavy breathing, and canned movie muzak accompanies the action. Amazingly, however, all the elements jell, creating a classic rough-trade girl movie.

Chipmunk-cheeked brunette Rene Bond set the sweetheart standard with her smiling, heart shaped face and luded-down doe eyes. As much of a product of ultra-low-budget Hollywood Boulevard film production as Sharon Kelly, Rene started in the porn business in the classic manner, brought in by her porno hustler boyfriend. In her films, she looks like any groupie with a white crochet purse walking on the Sunset Strip, hoping to meet a band member at the Whiskey-A-Go-Go. *Mona* director Howard Ziehm—who gave Rene some of her first jobs in his late-

1960s loops—remembers her as a naturally cute girl managed by a low-rent boyfriend. Rene became hugely popular in both soft- and hardcore films just before porno chic hit big, but because she and her boyfriend lived in a bottom-feeder milieu, they never knew her real value. Overworked and underpaid, Rene was also one of the sex industry's first implant casualties when distributor Harry Novak paid for surgical alterations to her charms. By all accounts, it was a botched tit job.

Many rumors have it that Rene is dead, but she was such a well-liked gal that no one really wants to believe she's gone. There's always the odd hope that she's out there somewhere, alive and well and living it on the down-low with a family of her own—and isn't just another porno statistic.

In 1972, Rene starred in legendary softcore director A. C. Stephen's R-rated *Fugitive Girls* (aka *Five Loose Women*). As shoestring and minimal as any of Stephen's softcore movies, such as *The Divorcee* (1969), it opens in a tawdry Hollywood Boulevard motel where Sheila (Dona Desmond) has just gotten it on with her scummy boyfriend. Later, he holds up a liquor store while she waits in the car. Though she didn't know what he was up to, she's convicted as his accomplice and sent to a women's prison that resembles an off-season summer camp, with only a handful of inmates. Among them are hardboiled Talie Cochrane and the easily duped Rene. The gals escape in search of buried cash, and argue constantly.

The movie is held together by the galvanizing performances of its two leads. Tack-spitting Talie is the archetype of a hard-as-nails, short-haired, flat-chested North Beach go-go dancer. Rene, on the other hand, is the sweet white-trash girl led astray, complete with frosted hair, barbiturate eyes, and a molasses accent. At this same time, you could still see Rene three blocks away at 8th Avenue's Venus Theater in her hardcore classic *Teenage Fantasies,* or buy a slick containing pictures of her in leather drag in *The Many Faces of Rene,* a popular offering at the Deuce's dirty bookstores. *Fugitive Girls* builds to an explosive climax, as Rene and Talie have a gritty, extended catfight on a cement mixer.

The script to *Fugitive Girls* was written by *Glen or Glenda* auteur Ed Wood. Ed also turns in a character sketch as an old geezer gas station attendant who rats out the girls to the police. The girls discover this and knock him around for his trouble. Wood, who was near death from alcoholism at the time this film was made, has all the charm of a quivering, sickly dog that perpetually soils the floor.

Wood spent his life fetishing his own emasculation as the 1950s archetype of the dominated wimp.

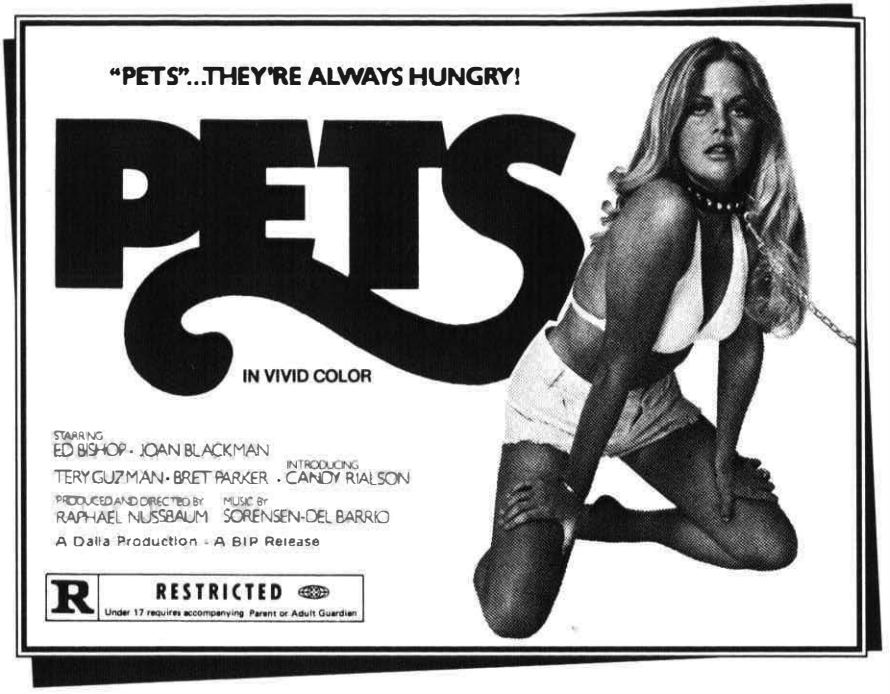
In the luminous erotic galaxy of roughie women, Candice Rialson is the blonde pricktease princess in halter top, bell-bottoms, and platform shoes. She made only a few films, and her appearances on the Deuce were brief, but that only made her more special and dreamy.

Candice had been before the cameras since she was a teenager, playing a girl on the beach in 1969's offbeat draft-dodger comedy *The Gay Deceivers,* the saga of two straights who pretend to be homosexuals to avoid Vietnam. She became a ubiquitous fetish after starring in kinky fare like *Mama's Dirty Girls* (1974), where she plays the aggressive co-conspirator daughter of a blowser who marries geezers and knocks them off for their money. Candice's erotic intensity carries the movie, from its opening scene of her masturbating before a mirror to scenes of her verbally humiliating a groping, retarded groundskeeper.

Her first starring role (as well as her most kinky and memorable one) was in the grindhouse S&M psychodrama *Pets* (1974), in which she plays a sexy submissive in cutoff jeans who can nonetheless believably snap at freaks in self-defense. Directed by the late, enigmatic Raphael Nussbaum and distributed by fly-by-night Burbank International, the film had a startling ad campaign that featured Candice on her knees in lip gloss and a dog collar, but the film only had short runs.

Director Nussbaum had a style that makes you think he also worked in porno under a pseudonym. Known for only a few films, including the off-kilter oddity *W.A.R. (Women Against Rape)* (1987), in which low-heeled Hollywood brothers Frank Stallone, Don Swayze, and Jerry Van Dyke play rapists targeted by a women's self-defense group, Nussbaum had his most memorable success with *Pets,* which lived up both to its outrageously kinky ad campaign and its sleazy, sexy, fuck-me trailer.

Candice plays Bonnie, a pretty young drifter with no family and only her looks to get by on. Her sexy, stray-kitten vulnerability attracts a succession of freaks willing to keep her, and Bonnie winds up in high-intensity situations that come to sudden bitter ends with severe individuals. The looming threat of violence or being thrown into the street at any minute keeps Bonnie on the defensive, making her as confrontational as she is vulnerable.




Candice Rialson preens in *Pets*—who wouldn't want to own one? (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)

S&M iconography is the film's driving force. *Pets* kicks off with a female dominance scenario familiar from the artwork of Eric Stanton and Bill Ward. Bonnie hooks up with Pat, a sassy, psychopathic, knife-wielding black scamstress. Together, they hitch a ride from a thrill-seeking, middle-aged married man. Bonnie taunts the old fart, calling him his "wife's lapdog," but then curiously throws sex on the guy anyway. They eventually leave him bound, humiliated, and robbed.

Bonnie is then picked up by Geraldine, a lesbian painter who spies her hungrily stealing fruit near the beach. Geraldine turns Bonnie into her model and plaything. As is inevitable when a homosexual keeps a heterosexual drifter, Bonnie grows bored, surly, and sexually unsatisfied. When she comes upon a thief prowling around Geraldine's house she verbally degrades him a little, then fucks him out of sexual desperation. Geraldine shoots the horny B&E artist in a fit of jealous rage when she finds out about their tryst.

Bonnie flees then to her final, most warped benefactor, Vincent, a wealthy, insouciant art connoisseur. Vincent had greatly admired and purchased Geraldine's portrait of Bonnie, so why not own the real thing? He's obsessed with collecting paintings, zoo animals, and females, and trains his "pets" to make them submissive. He gives Bonnie a taste of the whip, leaving marks, before making her the centerpiece of the private zoo that he keeps in his mansion's basement. There, she languishes on a velour bed in a giant cage surrounded by tigers, German shepards, and other aggressive creatures. Vincent carries the looming threat of Sadean zoophilia. He isn't having sex with Bonnie, so there's the degenerate hint that he'd enjoy some of the most depraved S&M voyeurism—watching Bonnie fuck one of the animals.

*Pets* relentlessly fulfills its prurient promises. There's a great deal of dressing up and down by Ms. Rialson, and although the narrative is visually propelled, the film (which was based on a play) is filled with pointed dominance dialogue comparing humans to animals. The S&M depictions are brief but graphic, and resemble the kinkiest peep booth loops. The straightforward sex scenes have the feel of early 1970s hardcore, down to the grinding organ music and purposefully raunchy camera placement.

In the mid-1970s, Candice tried to phase exploitation out of her career, making a brief appearance as a student flirting with Clint Eastwood in *The Eiger Sanction* (1975), but in 1976 she slipped back into the exploitation zone, taking the starring role in *Chatterbox,* an R-rated AIP comedy remake of *Pussy Talk,* the French hardcore hit about a woman's talking vagina. AIP initially shelved the movie, then gave it a limited release. (Ironically, *Chatterbox* was directed by Tom De Simone, who also made gay hardcore films and later made slick, sleazy women's prison movies like *The Concrete Jungle.*) Candice disappeared from the movie business after her final major studio bit part in *Winter Kills* (1979), and retired from acting altogether after marrying. But she never ceased packing drive-ins and grindhouses. Corman's New World Pictures stitched together a bunch of outtakes from their exploitation movies with quickly shot footage of Candice, calling this desperate cinematic Frankenstein loop *Hollywood Boulevard* (1976).

Some films offer a fetish stew of many rough-trade gals thrown together like an erotic deck of tarot cards, taking the heat as a group. Women's S&M prison epics shot in the Philippines gave viewers ample opportunity to see many of their

favorite female stars, like Pam Grier or Roberta Collins, in dreamy, fetishistic torture scenes, forced into labor under the hot sun, and striding about authoritatively in revealing uniforms. Catfights in the mud and melodramatic, violent escapes were a given.

The WIP (women in prison) genre was born from the 8mm hardcore kink loops shown at quarter peep booths and offered for sale at the Deuce's adult bookstores. Produced by P.O. box companies with cryptic names like RDF, TAO, and HOM, these loops depicted women receiving punishment as well as dishing it out. Certain performers in these loops—like Serena, the archetype of the sexy airhead white-trash California suburban runaway—built up dedicated followings.

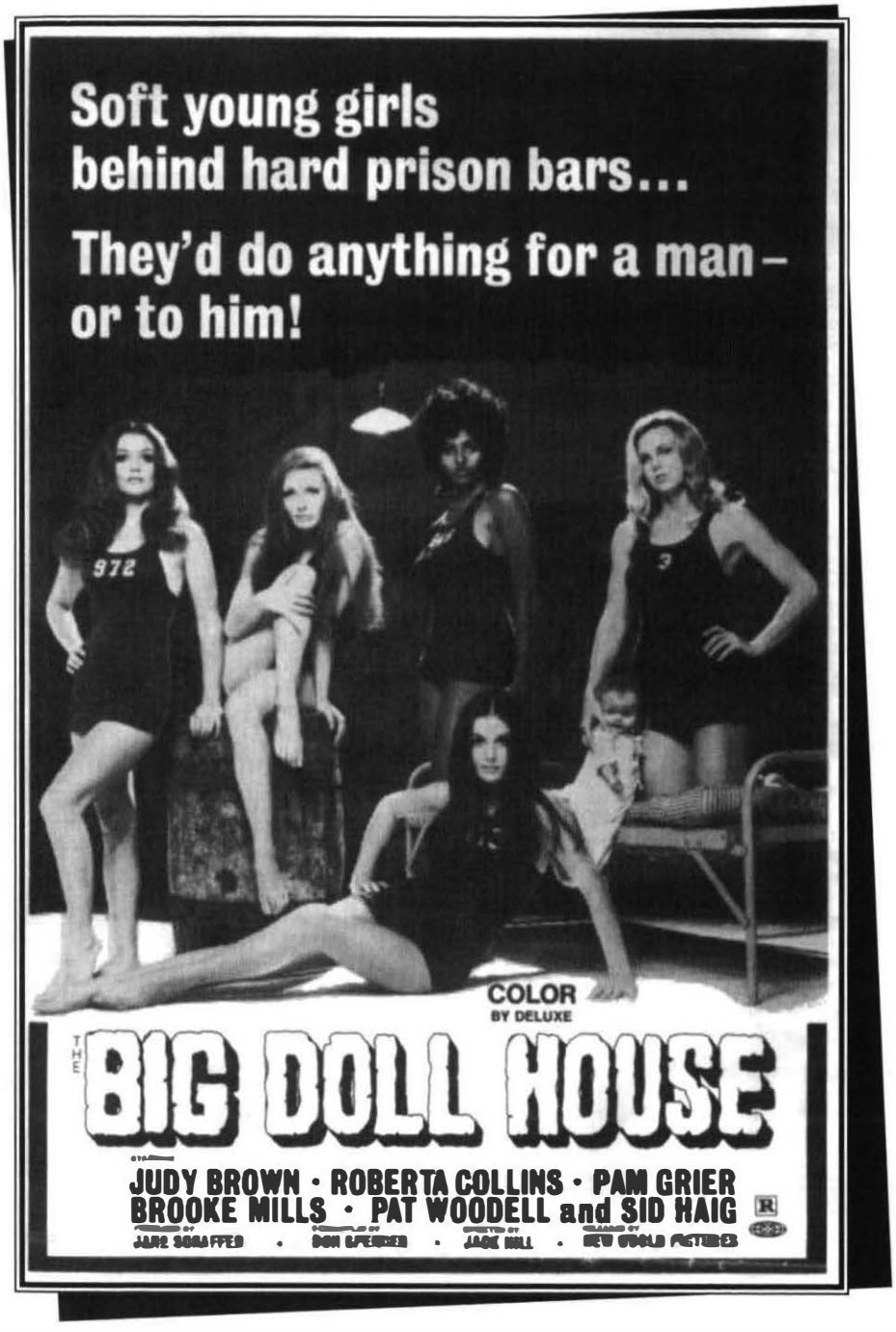
Director Jack Hill would become the chief auteur of the made-in-the-Philippines WIP, appropriating key peep-booth motifs, (sans hardcore) and smoothing them out with more professional production values. Hill had traded on fetish since his Nutrix book/Irving Klaw–influenced S&M film *Spider Baby* (1964). His first WIP effort, *The Big Doll House* (1971), provided the genre prototype. The Cinerama, the Harris Theater's upscale competitor, ushered in the film with an outrageous ad campaign that was right on target.



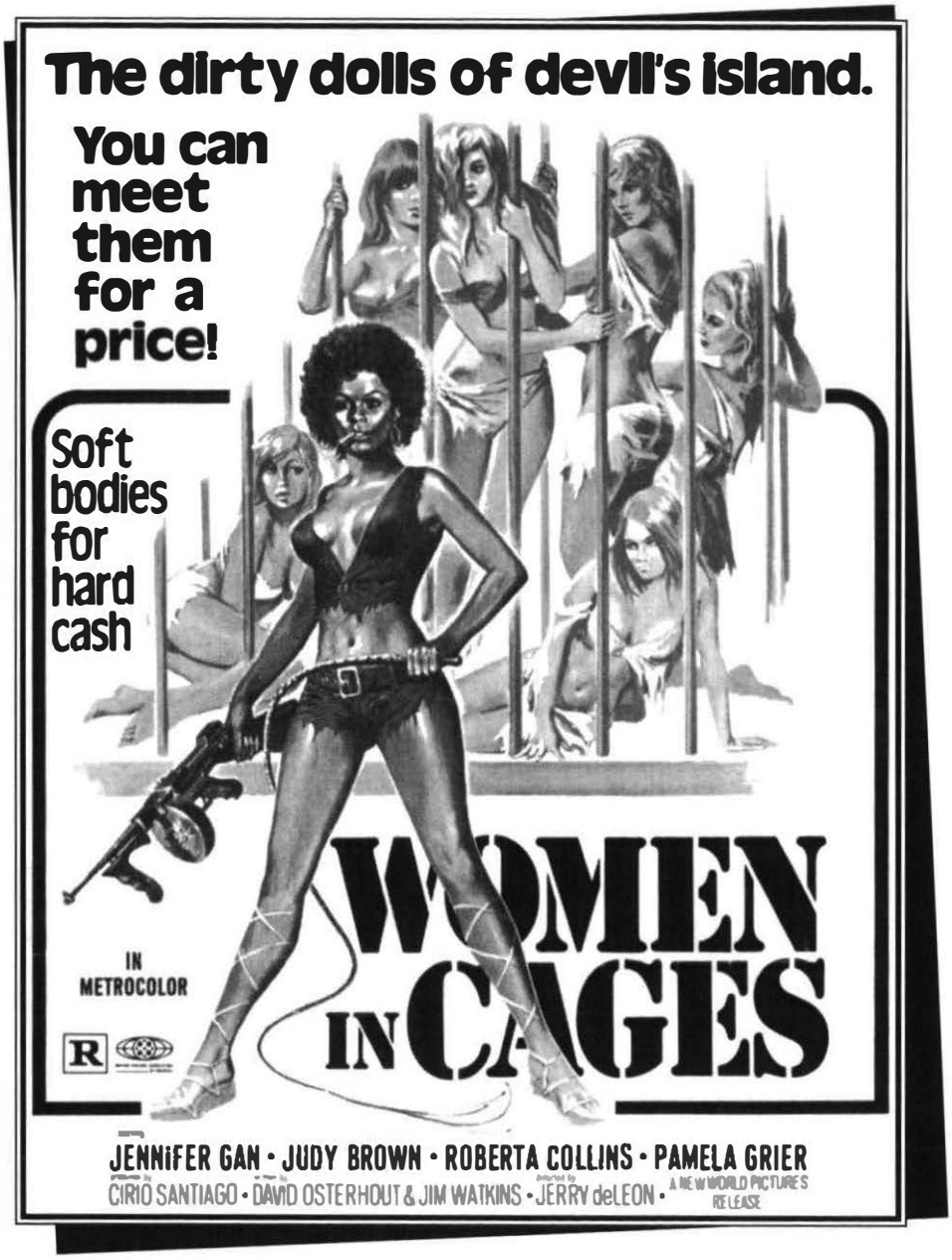


In the film, an evil, hooded figure brings various prisoners in for brutal torture sessions that include whippings and sweatboxes before the ultimate violent bust-out. Like a living set of S&M stills, the picture established lifelong personae for its cast members. Pam Grier was the big, black, and busty sadist who would prevail by any means necessary. She was subsequently cast as the overseer or bullying aggressive inmate in innumerable women's prison movies. Though often cast as her masochistic foil, Roberta Collins has an amazing range. From *Doll House's* ruffian cream puff to the bloused out, hard-boiled broad in Matt Cimber's horror opus *The Witch Who Came from the Sea* (1975), Roberta is a willowy, all-American blonde who can instantly turn tough under her sweet candy shell. She had a special talent for incarnating severe sexual bottoms that personify the brutal dark side of work by popular dominance artists like Eric Stanton. Her characters refuse to be mentally humiliated, so they withstand physical battery because it's easier on their psyches. In the classic WIP films, Roberta endured heavy torture sessions that left her barely able to stand, but she always retained her dignity.

Pam's unbridled ghetto-style sadism and Roberta's unbreakable masochism


Soft young girls
behind hard prison bars...
They'd do anything for a man–
or to him!
COLOR
BY DELUXE
THE BIG DOLL HOUSE
JUDY BROWN • ROBERTA COLLINS • PAM GRIER
BROOKE MILLS • PAT WOODELL and SID HAIG
R

The prototype of the WIP movie: These dolls pack a wicked punch. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)


The dirty dolls of devil's island.
You can meet them for a price!
Soft bodies for hard cash
IN METROCOLOR
R
WOMEN IN CAGES
JENNIFER GAN • JUDY BROWN • ROBERTA COLLINS • PAMELA GRIER
CIRIO SANTIAGO • DAVID OSTERHOUT & JIM WATKINS • JERRY deLEON •
A NEW WORLD PICTURES RELEASE

The most sadistic WIP movie ever, a high point of the genre. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)

provide the focus of Gerardo de Leon's *Women in Cages* (1972). It's Pam's most malevolent role ever. She *is* Alabama, the ass-kicking prison trustee who beats the inmates and presides over their hard labor with a whip in one hand and a gun in the other. Her charges wear smocks humiliatingly marked "P" for prisoner. All exposition and explanation is irrelevant in this picture, which rides on the pure visceral impact of torture scenes in which glamazon Pam works over Roberta, Judy Brown, and Jennifer Gan, spinning them on wheels, suspending and flogging them, burning the soles of their feet, and throwing them in isolation holes. Miss Alabama don't fuck around.

*The Big Bird Cage* (1972) was Jack Hill's more complex variant on the WIP theme, using more or less the same plot and starring many of the same cast members, including Sid Haig and Pam Grier (this time playing revolutionaries) plus Anitra Ford playing an ex-model inmate. Like its predecessor, the film played on and off for a decade and a half all over the Deuce.

*The Big Bird Cage* sustains a constant rhythm of sadism, yet the only torture set piece features a prisoner getting hung by her hair, a rather unique wrinkle. The film's raison d'être is to show the women put to forced labor in rice paddies or in the title contraption, a Rube Goldberg sugar mill. Everyone is outfitted in halter tops, cutoffs, or torn clothing. Footwear is nonexistent. There's a monumental catfight in the mud.

The hostile S&M template of ugly, sexually disgusting men tormenting abundantly sexy, idealized, unattainable women is set up. The male oppressors are either incapable of having sex with women or are borderline rapists or homosexuals. After an escape attempt, vicious warden Sid Haig, always typecast as a bald tormentor, chuckles at Anitra Ford, "You know, I just want to rape you for a while." Haig projects this offhand brutality throughout the film. The vicious warden (Andy Centenera) is a caricature of the decayed, impotent sadist who in real life would be buying *Olga* stills at Movie Star News. He shouts demands like "more punishment" and "less recreation" as the girls perpetually turn the mill. The warden looks physically frail next to his captives.

*The Big Bird Cage* has a real tenderloin streak of fag put-down humor that kept the Harris crowd amused. There are two fat, limp-wristed guards (one played to mincing perfection by Vic Diaz, who was so good at his job that he became the star of countless Filipino exploitation movies) who spend their screen time ridi-

Homosexual guard is heterosexually raped in *The Big Bird Cage*. "Get it up or we'll cut it off!" (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)

culing the women's advances on them and poking each other in the ass. Haig infiltrates the prison by acting like a screaming queen, and in what was intended to be the film's comic highlight, Diaz stares at Haig's dick as they use adjacent urinals. This plays out the paradoxical myth: You've got to beat down women before they emasculate you and turn you into a queer, yet only queens are capable of keeping hussies in their place, since their homosexuality distances them from the girls. Psychosexually, the movie uses the guards as eunuchs, appeasing the straight male audience that kept the genre afloat.

*The Big Bird Cage* is fleshed out with bizarre details, some funny, some disturbing. Freakish grade-school muscle-man graffiti sketches adorn the homosex-

ual guards' bedrooms. Oriental men, who look like they just stepped off a tour bus into a Times Square adult theater, play the politicians who use the prisoners as concubines. There are brief pre-*Ilsa* touches of violence, like bloody bird cage accidents and a guard's hand being chopped off.

The concluding big bust-out leaves most of the characters dead. Diaz gets raped by one of the girls as another sits on his face to stifle his whines. "Get it up or I'll cut it off!" yells one. An effect resembling caught film melting in the projector quickly and economically indicates the climactic explosion.

Margaret Markov played opposite Pam Grier in the female combat movies *Black Mama, White Mama* (1972) and *The Arena* (1973). A naturally well-built blonde, Margaret personified the Valley Girl gone rough trade out of necessity, the type of girl who doesn't want to fight you, but if you push her, will fight for her life. Margaret didn't need any makeup to look beautiful. She looked equally sexy in a potato sack prison smock and on the run in a nun's habit.

*Black Mama,* a distaff remake of *The Defiant Ones* shot for two cents in the Philippines, was one of the most popular Pam vs. Margaret vehicles on the Deuce. The storyline slams Pam's lowdown criminality against Margaret's sexy revolutionary posturing, and hooks the audience with its opening shower scene, in which the inmates wash each other off with a hose as the bull-dyke guard peels a horny eyeball through a peekhole. Lynn Borden, another naturally attractive blonde butched up with a hair bun, plays the pervert guard.

Margaret enrages Pam by succumbing to the dyke's advances to get herself better treatment. After a monumental food fight, they're both tossed topless with towels around their waists into an aluminum hot box that sits in the broiling sun. Later, they're about to be shipped off to a maximum-security prison when they manage to break out in their gaudy and obvious yellow smocks. Chained at the wrist, the woman engage in a constant push-pull, action-reaction struggle that sets in motion a movie-long catfight.

The chemistry between the two charismatic stars propels the film's kinky episodes, such as when Pam and Margaret wear nun's habits to stay incognito. The omnipresent Sid Haig lets two girls ride him like a horse. Shocking—literally and figuratively—is weasely Vic Diaz applying electroshock nipple torture to an unfortunate busty victim.

As *Black Mama* and *Fugitive Girls* proved, sometimes girls get fed up and

CHICKS IN CHAINS
...on the lam from a prison hell--
manacled together by hate and
the strange ideas a woman
gets after 1,000 nights
without a man.
BLACK MAMA WHITE MAMA
four associates, ltd. presents
an american international release
"BLACK MAMA, WHITE MAMA"
starring
pam grier · margaret markov
co-starring sid haig · lynn borden · zaldy zshornack · laurie burton · music composed and conducted by harry betts color by movielab
produced by john ashley and eddie romero · directed by eddie romero · screenplay by h. r. christian · story by joseph viola and jonathan demme

The longest, most erotic push-pull/yin-yang catfight ever in cinema—who'd want to cut the chain? (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)

aren't going to stay. Prison? Fuck you—they're leaving. That sentiment spurned a genre unto itself: the women's prison bust-out picture. Shoestring mid-70s L.A. productions tailored to the drive-in circuit, these films started turning up on the Deuce a full decade later, as part of double and triple bills. They were a sidestep from the women's prison genre in that their female protagonists wouldn't let jail confine them—they'd get out, whether it be through a boyfriend waiting in a

purring car on the other side of the state line or through whatever desperate, pathetic male they ended up abducting, fucking over, and abusing.

The ultimate women's bust-out film is *Five Angry Women* (1974; Deuce Opening 1984), which had a one-day run at the Liberty on a triple bill. It later became a Harris second feature in a perfect example of how a movie would bounce around the Deuce. The film opens with great red-lit, nighttime views of Hollywood Boulevard adult bookstores, strip joints, and assorted neon sleaze dens, and concerns fetish hooker types who escape from prison and embark on an endless chase. They bicker with each other throughout.

Neo-expressionistic flashes of the women in silhouette as the sun perpetually sets in the background recur throughout the heroines' flight from bondage. They abduct Pepe, a Mexican truck driver who doesn't seem interested in being in the movie. In the ten-minute slow-motion highlight, he laughs uncontrollably as he lets his big rig go out of control to freak out his shaky captors. It's so unintentionally funny that the whole audience was out of breath by the time the scene was over.

One of the prisoners' pimps goes on a street campaign to raise money with all his ho's to get his black bitch across the border, also obtaining some new workers as part of the bargain. Two of the pimp's Frederick's of Hollywood–styled hookers run into the archetypical exploitation movie john: the bald guy with mustache, boxer shorts, black stretch socks, and gooseflesh. He asks to "get my money's worth." They knock him on the floor and take his wallet as everyone in the Harris cracked up. *Five Angry Women* climaxes with a cameo by chubby Jake Barnes (the sometimes exploitation actor and scriptwriter for the notoriously well-regarded pornographer Radley Metzger, aka Henry Paris), who plays a detective who blusters in to shoot one of the heroines.

Ted Mikels's offbeat homage to the female rough-trade genre is *10 Violent Women* (1982), which offers women both behind bars and busting out. The film is a plethora of vaguely interconnected story lines. Ted himself plays the blusteringly nasty heavy in one, twirling his mustache, fidgeting with his shark's-tooth necklace, and doling out bags of flour masquerading as cocaine—a far cry from the gentle polygamist he is in real life. He winds up with a high heel in his stomach, just like the iconic image from his 1960s sexploitation movie *One Shocking Moment* (1965).

After this paroxysm, the movie turns into an animated Nutrix book as the heroines are imprisoned. Georgia Morgan, playing the sadist bull-dyke warden, gets so into her role that she seems to take control of the movie. We're treated to agonizing close-ups of her face, her blonde hair tossed back, her bright red lipstick painted over her thin lips. She spouts lines like, "You seem to be having problems. We're here to help you." A painting of her in 1930s gangster drag hangs above her bed. The zenith comes when she tortures leading lady Sherri Vernon by placing a steel bucket over her head and banging on it with a riding crop. It's a weird and theatrical moment. Rope bondage and shadows from a swaying lightbulb completes the stark, cruel scene.

The rest of *10 Violent Women* offers an abundance of ridiculous details: stock music and shots of Las Vegas, men in Tom Jones ruffled shirts and imitation Levi's jackets, overweight women in macramé vests, fake Arabs with grease on their faces for makeup, blockheads getting stripped of their clothes in gag sequences, and hilarious freeze-frame titles overstating the already ham-fisted narrative: "BUSTED" . . . "THE PLOT THICKENS" . . . "SHOOTOUT AT DUCK PARK." *10 Violent Women* exceeds the sum of its parts and stands out as one of the most eccentric of the female rough-trade films.





The urban confines of the Deuce played host to some countrified female rough-trade outings, too. Ferd and Beverly Sebastian had been a featured couple on the Deuce since their slick 1970 sexumentary *Red White and Blue,* a blend of *Mom and Dad* theology mixed with newly legal hardcore. *The Hitchhikers* (1971) was the Sebastians' bluegrass riff on the female rough-trade genre. It stars Misty "*Hee Haw*" Rowe as a barefoot and pregnant runaway who ends up with a group of gals led by a Manson-type cult leader who compels them to hitchhike in provocative outfits like halter tops and cutoffs, and then rob the drivers. *The Hitchhikers* lacks the erotic tension of the similarly themed *Dirty Dolls,* but is a pleasant enough groove, with surprisingly good production values.



The zenith of cornpone female rough trade movies came, ironically enough, from Long Island. After making the pioneering softcore soap opera *Interplay,* director Al Viola created and starred in *Preacherman* (1971). This neglected classic lays on all the elements of the country movie in giant proportions: the seduceable farmer's daughter, the horny bored wife, and the obliging phony priest with the happy hard-on. In a truly maniacal move, Viola bills himself as Amos Hux-

ley, which is his protagonist's name in the film. *Preachman* is notable for a cameo from the big-tits, big-hair, archetypal southern honey made for teasin' 'n' pleasin', Roxanne Brewer. Roxanne was a veteran of innumerable second-string stroke-books like *Male* and a handful of softcore obscurities like *Female Chauvinists*. Jeramie Rain of *The Abductors* and *Last House on the Left* also pulls off a sizzling, slutty cameo. Neither *Preacherman* nor *The Hitchhikers* made it to the Deuce until the close of the 1970s, years after their original release on the drive-in circuit, but they were both happily welcomed by audiences when they did.

Arthur Marks produced, directed, and distributed a series of female rough-trade movies that were released through the small West Coast outfit General Films. Intense studies of criminality, Marks' films were distinguished by their professional execution, superior production values that helped their tight budgets, and excellent casting and ensemble acting. They all operated on the same basic formula: Push violent white trash into a corner and watch the desperate violence that ensues.

All of the Marks movies are complex melodramas, sometimes with operatic three-part structures. The girls are good, bad, pursued by nuts, and generally running amuck. In *Roommates* (1973), a *Psycho*-like murderer targets models played by such rough-trade California stalwarts as Roberta Collins, Pat Woodell, and Christina Hart. In *Centerfold Girls* (1974), Andrew Prine plays a psychopath who stalks the monthly pinups that appear in a third-string men's stroke magazine. Curiously, Prine himself was a man of the month in *Viva* magazine at the time, so he brings an extra dimension of reality, zest, and understanding to the role.

After first terrorizing his victims by phone, Prine corners and murders them, keeping a single shoe from each as a fetish memento. The first section of this study of perversion concentrates on Prine targeting a nurse and masturbating in his hotel room. He keeps up the intensity of frustration until he crosses paths with an actual photo shoot for the magazine, taking place on a remote island. Throughout the shoot, the girls throw impromptu star fits, hurling superior recriminations and tact rejection at the male photographers. Prine peeks on all this and is provoked to pull a Ted Bundy, leaving several victims dead in his horny wake. He comes to his end when one of his intended snuff goddesses finally offs him on a beach, his last words a delusional, "I only wanted to *help* you . . ."

Today, the female rough-trade genre continues to attract fans. Director

Quentin Tarantino in particular is such an aficionado of the genre that he's revived obscure Jack Hill films like *Switchblade Sisters* on tape. Tarantino's 1997 movie *Jackie Brown,* is a veritable prayer at the altar of the rough-trade girls genre, featuring Pam Grier in the lead and on the soundtrack—the jailhouse scene is set to "99 Years," her theme song from *The Big Doll House.* Amazingly, Sid Haig shows up as well, riffing as a judge, and Bridget Fonda's role is based on Candice Rialson. The Harris audience would be proud.

# eleven

# The New Amsterdam Presents Celebrity Crime

**The New Amsterdam was near the well-frequented southeast corner of 42nd and** 7th Avenue—as you climbed out of the 7th Avenue IRT, it was the first grindhouse you'd see. This close proximity to the subway helped keep the New Amsterdam packed. Although the theater was dusty with age and many of its seats had gotten really crusty, hard, and springy, its interior was one of the true throwbacks to the Minsky's Burlesque days, with elegant accoutrements that included a large fireplace and chandeliers in the lobby—though if you looked above the crystal you could spot a number of bullet holes left in the ceiling after an attempted robbery. There were two balconies, both extremely high and offering both an overwhelming view of the screen and the exciting feeling of being suspended in the air. Both balconies would fill up during crowded weekend nights. The men's room, located in the vicinity of the fireplace, was a large, multi-stall affair, and it wasn't surprising to see patrons using it as an impromptu shooting gallery. Occasionally, you'd walk in on someone hanging over one of the sinks, staring at their reflection in the mirror, the needle still in their arm. Pulling it out, they'd usually display a surprising courtesy, murmuring, "Never mind me, I'll be done in a second."

The New Amsterdam's formula was to show a first-run movie with a tried and tested second feature. Big-budget exploitation actionramas like *Death Wish 3* and classics like *Don't Answer the Phone* had their premieres here. Or you could catch a double bill of kung fu flick *Flying Guillotine* and *Snuff,* to which inner city families brought their kids on Sundays, oblivious to its notoriety. Occasionally you'd catch such imports as *Cutthroats 9* or René Cardona's *Night of a Thousand Cats* on a Friday-through-Tuesday run.

The New Amsterdam's specialty niche, however, was premiering the Deuce's

celebrity crime movies, refracting cinematic reenactments of the Charles Manson and Jim Jones stories across its large screen. Times Square audiences ate it up—and the more cartoonishly it was portrayed, the better. That the films typically had blackballed or drug-addled Hollywood stars portraying these notorious mass murderers gave them a brilliantly surreal dimension.

The celebrity crime genre got off to an electrifying start in 1971, with a most unlikely star. Five years before, WASP archetype Troy *"A Summer Place"* Donahue's Warner Bros. contract had been up for renewal. Studio boss Jack Warner looked at Troy on the one hand, then at the country's rising freak tide on the other, and gave the clean-cut star the old heave ho. Fleeing an onscreen image he loathed anyway, Troy grew his hair, hopped on a motorcycle, and hoisted his freak flag high.

Knocking around the bottom barrel of showbiz, Troy met ex–big band DJ and sometime pornographer Robert L. Roberts. A likeable guy with a touch of Borscht Belt manner, Roberts had a refreshing pride about his role in exploitation film history. His first film was the softcore lesbian opus *Micheline and the Device* (1969), which was a moneymaker for the Avon Hudson Theater on 44th and Broadway. Roberts subsequently operated a closed-circuit TV station that supplied hotel rooms with adult movies and a Joe Franklin–style chat show that he hosted himself. When Roberts invited Troy on his show, he had an epiphany: "When I saw Troy he looked more like Manson than Manson. I was thinking of doing a picture based upon the Manson thing, so it occurred to me that this might be some offbeat casting."

Roberts's New York version of the Manson massacre, *Sweet Savior,* opens to reveal Troy disrobing, about to ball a woman on an altar during a black magick ritual. The credits roll and the title jingle plays as Troy blasts through Manhattan on his motorcycle. His Manson character, Moon, has a few ratty chicks working the St. Marks Place/Lower East Side hustle. Tex Watson is renamed "Bull" and the hard-boiled Talie Cochrane plays a character vaguely based on murderer Susan Atkins. Talie became well known in the mid-70s for playing hard-bitten, heartless bitches in *Fugitive Girls, The Candy Tangerine Man,* and other exploitation favorites.

The movie grows prurient after Moon's dirty crew crashes a movie star party at a "mansion" (in reality nothing more than a mundane suburban house on Long Island), enjoying Cheese Doodle hors d'oeuvres as the Jay Sebring character, an

Troy Donahue makes Charlie Manson a drug-dealing East Village sneaker pimp in *Sweet Savior*; at the far left is exploitation's toughest of cookies, Talie Cochrane. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)

exaggerated exploitation transvestite, seduces Bull to the tune of "This Looks Like Love." Talie bumps and grinds lewdly. Renay Granville, daughter of Hollywood star Bonita Granville (who was fetishized in such films as *Maid of Salem*) plays the Sharon Tate figure. Pregnant during the shoot, Renay gets stabbed with retractable knives. Although the sex in the movie is quite explicit, the violence is mercifully flimsy.

A bunch of cops stop Moon and company's van just after the crime. Moon talks his way out of any trouble, giving a peacenik hippie rap. The movie ends with Moon roaring down Park Avenue on his chopper, stopping to give the finger to the American flag as the title song plays in reprise.

*Sweet Savior* is the apotheosis of sleazoid cinema, from its conception to execution, and is a central work in the celebrity crime genre. While much of the picture is unintentionally funny, its elements work well in concert, making it effective dramatically. The shoestring budget couldn't permit a location shoot in L.A. *So what.* In that unstoppable exploitation way, director Roberts just reshaped the events for a New York setting. Troy Donahue is surprisingly convincing as a drug-dealing 1970s pimp, a type that was legion on St. Marks Place. Authenti-

cally grubby East Village freaks flesh out the background. As Bob astutely put it, "You didn't have to go to California to find a small Manson crew. You had small Manson crews all over New York."

The cast and crew are exploitation pros. With his pornographer's sensibility, director Roberts consistently cuts to the chase, moving the action along at a breakneck pace. The script, pseudonymously credited to "Matt Cavanagh," is actually by Willie Gilbert, who adapted *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* for the Broadway stage. The hippie bubblegum soundtrack works fine, and, surprisingly, was composed by legendary girl-group/Brill Building producer-songwriter Jeff Barry.

*Sweet Savior* premiered in the fall of 1971 on a double bill with *B.J. Lang Presents,* the bizarre, claustrophobic Mickey Rooney horror vehicle. Released through Trans World Attractions, Roberts's own company, it played at the Trans-Lux East on 58th Street and 3rd Avenue and the Trans-Lux West on 49th Street and Broadway, as well as at a sprinkling of outer-borough grindhouses in the roughest neighborhoods, such as the Rugby in Flatbush, Brooklyn. Its all-too-brief Friday-through-Tuesday run marked it for instant obscurity. Premiering only two years after the actual Manson Family murders, the film was unanimously attacked by critics as utterly tasteless, and the New York *Daily News,* for one, awarded it zero stars. As Roberts later commented, "I pride myself that I'm ahead of my time, but it's not good to be ahead of your time. You've got to be there, on the time."

The exploitation fans who caught the bill, however, were not let down. Word of mouth from die-hard exploitation fans who'd managed to catch its run built the film's myth. It remained a dormant legend until it resurfaced in the mid-1970s as *The Love Thrill Murders.* Exploitation distributor Universal Marion had considered the original ad campaign, with Troy's Christlike face above the title, too offensive for certain southern-fried religious sensibilities, so for the rerelease they went directly for the roughie sell, juxtaposing an image of a bound woman with a switchblade engraved "MOON."

At the outset of the 1980s, the newly formed New York distributor Troma acquired the rights to the film. Troma had better taste in its outside acquisitions than in abysmal productions like *The Toxic Avenger* (1985), with which the company became synonymous. *Sweet Savior,* along with the freak-era film noir parody *Cry Uncle!,* became a very personal jewel in their sleazoid library: Troma co-head

Lloyd Kaufman had been production manager on *Sweet Savior* as a kid, and had played a small role in *Cry Uncle!* Troma reduced *Sweet Savior*'s X rating to an R through 90 seconds of cuts, but these were never evident in any of the prints Mr. or Mrs. Sleazoid ever viewed. For that, we give kudos. Troma's rerelease did brisk drive-in business in Philadelphia and New Jersey before it resurfaced in 1986 on triple-bills at the crumbling New Amsterdam.

Perhaps the most startling celebrity crime film to ever play the New Amsterdam was the exploitation documentary *Manson* (1972), whose codirector/producer, Laurence Merrick, had been Sharon Tate's acting teacher. He made exploitation movies as diverse as *The Black Angels* (1969) and the gay vampire curio *Does Dracula Really Suck?* (1969) before documenting the killers who had murdered his beautiful student and friend.

*Manson* is an improvisatory patchwork quilt of interviews, voice-overs, and newsreel footage, with startlingly threatening scenes of ranting Manson women Squeaky Fromme and Sandra Good interspersed throughout. Charlie's old greaser cellie from Terminal Island recalls Manson as a no-good young punk motherfucker. He says that Charlie "was someone you'd *use*," a comment that elicited snickers from some of the more knowing segments of the New Amsterdam audience. Prosecutor Vincent Bugliosi—a man so permeated by his own showbiz flavor that he would forever cast himself as Manson's Inspector Javert—appears on-screen to give his *Helter Skelter* theories. "Manson must have had a pretty powerful personality," marvels Bugliosi, as news clips present Charlie giving a plethora of idiotic frowns and infantile faces.

Easygoing ex–Family members Paul Watkins and Brooks Posten reveal how superpimp Charlie turned out his boys as often as his girls. An actor mimicking Charlie's hick accent overdubs the same footage of Manson that the film samples throughout work: "I've been beaten up by cops. . . . The same man who writes you a traffic ticket kicks my head in."

Basking in his fame, Bugliosi fails to point out the obvious, mundane criminality that is Manson. Charlie was no false messiah: He was a mangy ex-con pimp who learned his trade through his prostitute mother and jail. Manson offered protection to weak-willed societal dropouts, kids who were turned away by their parents and who were already mixed up in low-level sex work and garbage-head drugs.

Some Manson associates, like Bobby Beausoleil, appear only through flashes of their standard Associated Press photos, although sketches of them appeared prominently in the film's ad campaign, to exploit their aura. On the other hand, the film is a veritable open forum for Sandra Good, Squeaky Fromme, and Nancy Pitman, filmed in a proto-survivalist shed, shooting hostile speed-freak glares at the camera and proudly displaying their extensive firearms collection. They babble in a groupie clutch that Manson was Jesus Christ, who came down and was crucified again. Despite the Manson girls' racism, they pre-date the ghetto fabulous pimp daddy ethos and style.

Ronni Howard, the hard-bitten, pill-addicted, ex-con B-girl whore cell mate to whom Susan Atkins made her murder confession, appears looking very downed out under her huge concrete beehive hairdo. Ronni crossed Atkins's path when she was jailed for forging a barbiturate prescription. During the interview, she fearfully holds up a newspaper headline referring to her being shot at, and says that by the time the movie is in theaters, she could be dead. Squeaky and the gang appear to confirm that "snitches will be dealt with."



Ronni discusses the Family's infamous celebrity hit list, which comes off as the product of an extended speed-freak/acid-head rant, exuding typical drug-fueled sick humor. She recalls sitting in jail, showing Atkins a picture of Elizabeth Taylor and commenting that she thought Taylor was glamorous. Atkins responded by describing how the Family planned to bring out Taylor's "inner beauty" by gouging out her eyes and applying a hot poker to her face. There's a still of Tom Jones's name on a Vegas marquee, and another of the man himself, tinted a sickly green. Atkins thought Jones was sexy, and told Ronni she wanted to fuck him then stab him to death as she climaxed. The disquieted Ronni states that the Family "hated Sinatra." As we're treated to a few dour pictures of Frank, she reveals that they wanted to "hang him upside down and skin him alive to his own music. Then Charlie wanted to sell pouches of his skin to hippie head shops so everyone could buy 'a little piece of Frank.' " Ronni sits incredulous and drugged, still not believing the freako fix she's found herself in.



A fascinating example of shoestring inventiveness, both grotesquely laughable and unflinchingly revealing, *Manson* garnered an Oscar nomination for best documentary, a rare feat for an exploitation film. Its aftermath was not so auspi-

The terrifying truth behind the Sharon Tate massacre!
Meet ONE MAN'S FAMILY
YOU WILL ACTUALLY SEE each member of the Manson Family and HEAR their horrifying philosophy of Sex, Perversion, Murder and Violence!
REVEALED FOR THE FIRST TIME the staggering details of the most hideously bizarre murders in the annals of crime--SUPPRESSED UNTIL NOW and NOT PERMITTED on TV, Radio or Family Newspapers!
WE CANNOT DISCLOSE HOW SOME OF THESE FILMS WERE OBTAINED but you will hear the shocking FACTS told in their own words BY THE KILLERS THEMSELVES!
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A sadism bouillabaisse: Exploitation collage work in full force, with the real-life psychopaths performing just for you. True to its brilliance, its maker was murdered. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)

cious, though: Once the film gained popularity, an unidentified man gunned down Laurence Merrick in a parking lot; a few years later, Ronni Howard was also shot to death. To this day, Merrick's murder remains unsolved, and has only boosted the heavy nihilist reputation of the Manson gang and their powers of retribution.

When Patty Hearst began making headlines after sticking up banks in the mid-1970s, she left the public to wonder whether she was brainwashed by a lunatic anarchist fringe or just a crazy heiress. Inevitably, her story proved a natural for quickie celeb crime vehicles. *Abduction* (1975) was an unrelentingly nasty roman à clef that dodged libel problems by juggling significant events and fictionalizing names, although the heroine is blatantly named "Patricia." The movie is punctuated by grim interracial rape scenes, detailed down to the realistic sickening noises of the black aggressor's thighs smacking against his victim. It also fea-

tures a twisted film-within-a-film device: The victim's father crumbles as he watches sick home movies sent by the kidnappers, documenting his daughter's abuse.

Although critically reviled, *Abduction* was graphic enough to be a commercial success. Director Joseph Zito was well versed with bondage and discipline in exploitation films, having been a fan of the *Olga* movies during their initial run. *Abduction* amply demonstrates Zito's slick, sleazy talent for executing the lurid. He later went on to make such Chuck Norris actioners as *Invasion U.S.A.* and *Missing in Action.* Zito takes advantage of some offbeat casting, including Hollywood burnouts Dorothy Malone and Lief Erikson and Catherine Lacy, a $1.98 Catherine Deneuve infamous for making softcore appearances in a series of 1976 hardcore porno-chic hits like *Through the Looking Glass, Expose Me Lovely,* and *The Double Exposure of Holly.* In a curious footnote, *Abduction* generated controversy because its source material, a novel called *Black Abductor,* had been considered by certain law enforcement theorists to be a blueprint for the SLA's kidnapping of Hearst.



After *Sweet Savior,* Bob Roberts pseudonymously made one of the most shocking mixed-combo interracial hardcore porn features, *The Big Man* (1974). A staple of Times Square adult grindhouses through the mid-1980s, *The Big Man* again features Roberts's incredible use of lifted music, including the Bee Gees' "To Love Somebody" to the Rolling Stones' "Loving Cup," which underscored a jolting scene of geriatric sex. The cast included Turk Turpin, a black actor who'd gotten his start in Ossie Davis's *Cotton Comes to Harlem* but who also appeared in hardcore productions owing to the dearth of jobs for black actors in mainstream film. Turk was happy to take any film work he was offered.



Roberts's contact with porn performers and the irresistible sensationalism of the Patty Hearst case again inspired him to work within the celeb crime genre. Bob went full-throttle outrageous with *Patty* (1976), one of the genre's most rarely seen and most audacious films. Released in hard-X, soft-X, and R-rated versions, the movie stars Hearst look-alike Sarah Nicholson (aka Jennifer Jordan), a popular hardcore actress who specialized in S&M roles. In 1970, Sarah had starred in *Tomatoes,* one of the first commercially released hardcore films, but her career had a curious art film beginning: As a kid in the mid-1960s, she had acted in *El Marciano,* a sci-fi short made in Spain from a Ray Bradbury script.

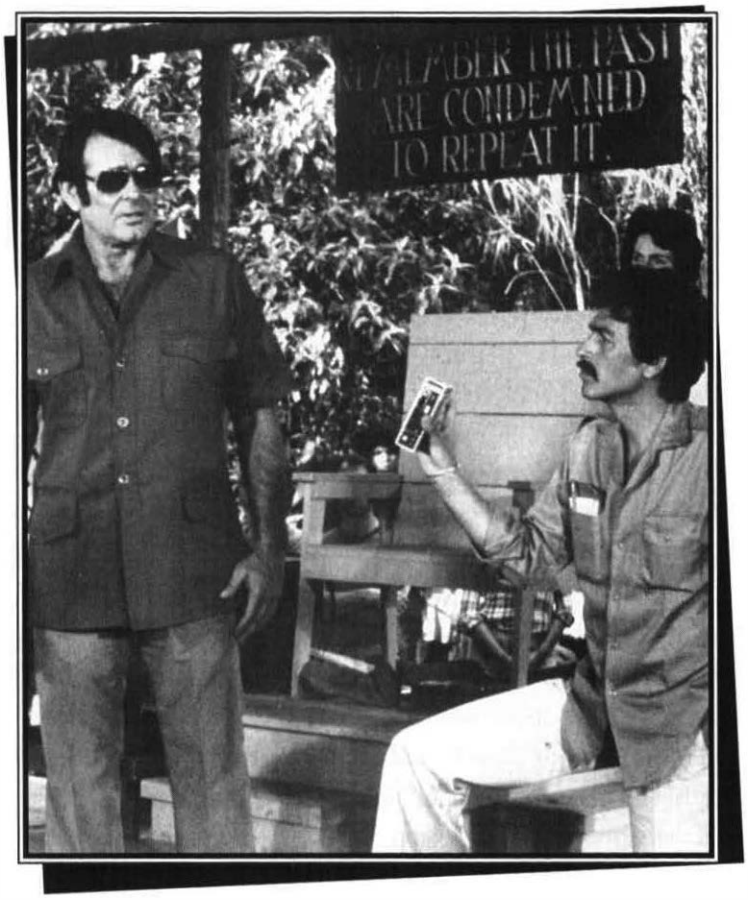
Bob fleshed out the supporting cast with the naked body of porno-chic superstar Jamie Gillis, plus Hollywood bit players Frank Adonis and Lenny Montana, who had appeared in *The Godfather.* Commentary by real shrinks was overdubbed during initiatory sex scenes. The film's ad campaign had Sarah holding a gun, with the SLA insignia blazing behind her.

The velour soul group The Moments, well known for urban romantic hits like "Love on a Two-Way Street," performs the theme song, "Patty," which opens with, "Patty . . . what's gotten into you . . . ," and their hit "Look at Me (I'm in Love)" is given a distaff soul-sister cover that accompanies the film's graphic sex scenes. The movie actually spawned a tie-in album, which featured the images of Sarah/Patty on the cover and Turk Turpin as General Cinque embracing the members of The Moments on the back.

About working on the sly in New York locations, Gillis recalled, "I was concerned that during the bank robbery we might all be shot dead by passing police who might not know it was only a movie. The movie was made before she [Hearst] was found and we were concerned that our ending might be different from the real ending—so there was some talk about the best way to end the movie." As it turned out, Hearst was apprehended just as the production was ending, which prompted Roberts to shoot a quickie finale that jibed with reality.

*Patty* played for one week at the Trans-Lux West on 49th and Broadway before court orders shut the movie down. One of the psychiatrists who lent narration sued Roberts, and the film became plagued with injunctions. Nonetheless, *Patty* holds the distinction of being one of the boldest, most original, and least-seen celebrity crime movies of all time.

A later film that exceeded the New Amsterdam audience's expectations was *Guyana: Cult of the Damned* (1980), based on cult leader Jim Jones, who in 1978 ordered some nine hundred of his followers to drink cyanide-laced Kool-Aid at his People's Temple in Central America. Jones was the Elvis of cult leaders. Swathed in polyester, perpetually wearing dark shades, he consumed as many uppers, downers, and other narcotics each day as most pharmaceuticals junkies do in a month. Jones enjoyed having secretive sex with both male and female followers, along with using them for forced labor, wrestling matches, and S&M displays. As one of his top aides put it, "In order to be trusted by Jim, you had to get fucked by him."




Stuart Whitman kicks out the jams as drug addict and sociopolitical mass murderer Jim Jones. "In order to be trusted by Jim, you had to get fucked by him." (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)

As he had with *Survive* (1976), his movie based on the Andes airplane crash victims who cannibalized the remains of dead fellow passengers, the indefatigable René Cardona, Jr. rushed his dramatization of the Jonestown tragedy into production in his native Mexico soon after the actual events. For his story, Cardona relied on news reports and a strange audiotape of the suicide that was sold through a tiny ad on the cover of *The New York Times*.

Universal Pictures shoved the resulting film into U.S. theaters to make a quick buck. This version was slightly trimmed for an R rating and had a tacked-on narration by a character we never see. Missing in this version are, among other things, a jolting opening in which someone blows his brains out before a mirror,

apropos of nothing. Even without these scenes, though, the Universal cut had such a thick sense of tawdry exploitation that it became one of the inspirations for starting *Sleazoid Express* in 1980.

The storyline kicks off with "Rev. Jim Johnson" (Stuart Whitman) in a white suit and sunglasses, pointing to a crudely drawn map of Guyana during one of his sermons. Cut to one of his recalcitrant followers being knocked out and left on train tracks, where he's soon turned into chopped steak by a passing train.

Johnson moves his followers to Guyana, where the setting resembles an off-duty day camp or a Florida U-pick farm. Cardona quickly veers into startling scenes showing the reverend's freaky proclivities. After catching three little boys stealing food, Johnson presents them to his followers, demanding of each of their fathers, "What shall I do with your son?" "Punish him," they each reply dutifully. A quick montage reveals one kid getting dunked in water, another being tied up and covered with snakes, and the third being stripped naked, put into bondage, and given electric shocks to his genitals. The sequence ends with the three nude boys groveling before Johnson, who purrs, "I *punish* you because I *love* you."

Even freakier is the next sex torture sequence. A couple is fucking in the bushes when up pops Rev. Johnson, wearing sunglasses at night. He drags them naked before the rest of the followers, bellowing at the girl, "You will perform the sex act with a man of *my* choice!," and calls over a huge black man, who looms over the woman menacingly. Johnson turns to her captured partner and exclaims, "You will perform the sexual act with a male!" This display of forced homosexuality made the New Amsterdam audience snicker conspiratorially.

After this roughie bisexual mixed-combo live show, Johnson blows a gasket and it's time for a mass-suicide rehearsal. Johnson exhorts, "The CIA is outside! They're going to exterminate the blacks! They're envious and jealous of the racial harmony we've achieved at Johnsontown." Bradford Dillman, as Johnsontown's Dr. Feelgood and chief Kool-Aid mixer, feeds Johnson more drugs to combat the kidney and liver pains so familiar to anyone who's used pills excessively.

Congressman Lee O'Brien (Gene Barry) makes his way to Johnsontown accompanied by a cadre of top newsmen, all of whom look more like Mexican day laborers than NBC reporters. The tension mounts over sweaty location shots of tropical Guyana. Johnson's conspiracy theorist lawyers stumble into a building housing sick black people, where one of them (a mummified Joseph Cotton) mut-

ters with horror, "My God, it looks like a slave galley." Somewhere in all this, the Johnsontown singers make an appearance.

The congressman is gunned down when he attempts to take some of Johnson's followers back to America, and a re-enactment of the mass suicide ensues. People wriggle around like dying cockroaches for a good ten minutes. The couple who'd been forced to give the sex display act like terminal swingers, slowly sharing sips of the same Kool-Aid cup, taking it in slowly and exchanging meaningful glances. One vibrating, psychedelically colored scene attempts to place the viewer inside the skull of a dying cult member. The film climaxes with a reproduction of the famous fat-belly/white-shoes photo of the rev shot dead. The camera pans across the corpses, and the credits appear over a lyrical sunrise.

This last scene puts *Guyana: Cult of the Damned* up there with *Mandingo* for filmed child abuse. Mexican extras were paid a couple of pesos to have their kids participate in suicide re-enactment. A scene of three guys holding a little girl's held back and force-feeding her Kool-Aid looks creepily like a peep-booth loop from RDF, a company that produced the most brutal torture loops. (Their products were a staple of Blackjack Books, right next door to the New Amsterdam.) The sequence involving the three boys caught stealing seems designed for sadistic gay pedophiles.



Besides its overt shock value, *Guyana: Cult of the Damned* is propelled by René Cardona's mustard-smeared sense of tabloid style. A Jonestown movie today would feature a bunch of *Faces of Death* meat shots of the real event. Cardona instead supplies a complete recreation, unembarrassed by any of the tackiness he resorts to. He displays persistence, drive, and a knack for sensationalism. Cardona is such a *Peliculas* traditionalist that he uses a roman à clef format with fake but obviously similar names for the real people portrayed.

Many of the cast members are one-dimensional but hilarious, like Bradford Dillman's perpetually nervous drug dispensing, Kool-Aid mixing doc. Stuart Whitman makes a fine Jim Jones, and is Method actor enough to immerse himself in the part, effectively capturing the irritability and mood swings of a kinky pillhead baking in the hot sun with a thousand slavish followers and lots of legal troubles. The movie has the high velocity of an animated *National Enquirer* story and is a classic in the pantheon of crime exploitation movies.

A few years later, the Deuce premiered *Amin: The Rise and Fall* (1981), with

star Joseph Olita virtually indistinguishable from Ugandan dictator Amin. It was heavily promoted with life-size cardboard Amin reproductions in theater lobbies, and saturation TV spots ending with his declaration "NO ONE MESS WITH ME! BIG DADDY!" The movie recreated many of Amin's foulest habits, down to his cannibalizing enemies, yet it was essentially plodding and dull, without the pace or electricity that its subject demanded. Sadly, with *Amin: The Rise and Fall,* the "great crimes" exploitation genre ended with a thud.

# twelve
# Orientalia Comes to the Deuce

**Orientalia staked out its place in Times Square in the late 1960s at the Bijou** Theater, a small place on 46th Street right off Broadway. Well kept, if slightly dusty, the Bijou regularly advertised in *The New York Times* and *The Village Voice,* and attracted a quiet, steady, predominantly Asian crowd, with a sprinkling of kink-seeking round-eyes. Although the Asian movies went further than others in terms of aesthetics, sexuality, and violent shock, they weren't subject to the censorship that attacked much 1960s exploitation, and were shown in large, sophisticated cities like New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, at venues that wouldn't be affected by any MPAA seal or local censor boards. They didn't fit any traditional strictures of pornography (making it difficult to go after them legally as obscene) and could often use the "art film" label.

The Japanese movies that played the Bijou—such as the blind swordfighter *Zatoichi* series and Toshiro Mifune's immensely popular wandering samurai adventures like *Yojimbo* (1961), both perpetual revival favorites—stood out for being more graphically violent and less regulated by censorship than their occidental counterparts. In the terror classic, *Onibaba* (aka *The Hole;* 1965), two women lure in wandering samurai, whom they then impale and throw into a mass grave. *Harakiri* (1963) focused on an evil warlord who, instead of helping indigent postwar samurai, forces them to commit the title act in a perversion of the traditional Japanese code of honor. A poor but determined samurai brings him to justice kamikaze style. *Harakari* contains both graphic violence and some of the most magnificent swordplay ever put on screen, filmed against a backdrop of hypnotically flowing fields.

*Fires on the Plain* (1959) depicted Japanese soldiers in World War II forced

by starvation to resort to cannibalism—which they euphemistically call eating "monkey meat." And how can one forget the perennial Bijou revival *Throne of Blood* (1957), the Akira Kurosawa adaptation of *Macbeth,* whose blood-drenched climax features Toshiro Mifune stuck with swords like a porcupine? It was all too good.

When bisexual nationalist novelist Yukio Mishima committed harakari after a group of soldiers laughed at his plea that they revolt against Japan's postwar government, the Bijou showed a snuff film of the event that was announced by a tasteful yet blunt newspaper advertisement. This shocker was double-billed with Mishima's underground featurette *The Rite of Love and Death* (1961 Japan opening, 1965 U.S.), which depicted harakari as part of the traditional Japanese code of honor. The filmmaker himself plays the protagonist, and is totally nude in the sexually explicit pre-suicide scene.

In the erotic realm, *Violated Angels* (1968), depicted severe rope-bondage fantasies. Shot in a strange, artful combination of black-and-white and color, it concerns a Richard Speck–like nurse murderer in Japan. Eventually he presents the corpses of his victims to his inamorata, with the unforgettable proclamation that he did this in homage to her. *Gate of Flesh* (1964) concerns on *Olga*-like group of dominant Japanese prostitute bitches who heap plentiful torment onto one submissive initiate, with beatings, force-feedings, and painful suspension. The audience sat in silent rapture.

In 1969, Nagisa Oshima made *Boy,* one of the first Japanese movies to carry the art house warning "no one under 18 admitted," but no one going to see the film was ever carded. *Boy* is a disturbing neorealist movie based on a newspaper article Oshima had read about parasite parents who shove their son in front of cars so they can shake the frightened drivers down for money. Oshima later went on to fame with *In the Realm of the Senses* (1976), one of the few art house hits that managed to include hardcore sex without any loss of critical reverence.

Though *Violated Angels* and *Gate of Flesh* were sexually explicit, the first Japanese import to cross over into the American sexploitation circuit and play Manhattan with a self-imposed X rating was *Nanami: The Inferno of First Love* (1969), also known simply as *Nanami, First Love* (1967 Japan opening, 1969 Deuce premiere). *Nanami* opened at the World 49th Street Theater, with distribution handled both through the adult movie outfit Distribpix and the Japonica-

fueled Golden Eagle Pictures. The film became an occasional replay at such revered Manhattan art houses as the Bleecker Street and Carnegie Hall cinemas throughout the late 1970s.

*Nanami* creates its own unique aesthetic, expanding on a straightforward narrative to encompass discreet bits of hand-held cinema verité; angular, subjective mental images; and John Cage–like sound fragments. This stylistic mosaic is appropriate, as *Nanami* traverses a sexual universe that runs the gamut from norms to taboos, encompassing S&M, voyeurism, exhibitionism, narcissism, male and female homosexuality, pedophilia, impotence, nude modeling, prostitution, and love at first sight—all in equal proportions—as it tells the story of a romance between a massage parlor girl and a mentally shaky young man.

The film opens as we trail the protagonists, Nanami (Kunio Ishii) and her boyfriend Shun (Akio Takahashi), walking down a crowded street. In that resolute Japanese way, it's never explained how they met. The Japan of *Nanami* still has a cold and dismal postwar atmosphere, even though the film was lensed in the mid-1960s. It's simultaneously urban and primitive.



Nanami and Shun go to a lover's hotel, which is little more than stalls with dividers, through which drift the sexual noises of adjacent couples. A leering mamasan delivers towels. Although Shun proclaims his love for Nanami like a mantra, he quickly proves impotent.



Nanami doesn't hold Shun's failed performance against him, and in fact appreciates that he likes her for more than just sexual reasons. Nanami means no one ill. Although she's barely out of high school, sex work has made her a functional Darwinist with a tolerance and understanding for men's sexual hang-ups.

Nanami's empathy prompts Shun to supply a thumbnail autobiography, which we see in flashback. Shun's mother abandoned him as a toddler to go off with her boxer lover. There's a brief view of a woman in a kimono next to a vague male figure waving "Bye Shun" to a little boy in a desolate landscape. Shun is adopted by a metalworker and his wife, whom he calls his mother and father. He becomes the metalworker's apprentice. Hypnotic shots show both men in a traditional, minimalist Japanese room, tapping rhythmically on tiny objects.



Shun and Nanami agree to give relations another try soon. They return to their respective lives, with Nanami working as a photographer's model at a massage parlor in the city's red-light district. The girls stand at the doorway, shouting

out to passersby to drum up business. Old men take nude snapshots of them, sometimes in pairs, verbally subjugating a girl now and then, giving the film a twist of sadistic kink.

Shun plays in a park with a little girl, Naomi, who's about the same age he was when his mother abandoned him. Shun likes being with Naomi because he's so lacking in familial affection, and is a little stunted himself. All this lends a subtle sexual edge to their games and provides a disturbing illustration of how Shun's life circumstances have warped him.

Shun not-exactly-innocently touches Naomi's behind as she gets on a slide. Bystanders see this, and, assuming the worst, chase Shun through crowded streets, shouting "Bastard! You dirty pervert!" The police break it up. A psychiatrist puts Shun under hypnosis via a shot of sodium pentothal. Clouds of smoke billow through a fishbowl lens. Shun experiences disturbing flashbacks of his stepfather, who has strange, effeminate eyebrows, trying to sodomize him in a bathroom. Knowing what's about to be revealed, Shun's stepmother interrupts, demanding, "Stop the hypnosis!"

At her photo studio, Nanami meets a bearded Yakuza gangster who offers her work with a camera club. The Yakuza greases the palm of a creepy shopkeeper to use his basement for the event, in which male spectators snap away as the women engage in brutal girl-on-girl, Asian-vs.-Eurasian/American beatings, slappings, and armed catfights that end in simulated death scenes, all of it accompanied by a cacophony of camera clicks. Drunk from sake, the men are bathed in sweat, gripping their cameras. The POV angle goes upside down/right-side-up as Nanami is tied to an X-cross. A tall, longhaired Eurasian woman slaps her face, whips her, and rides her like a horse. The spectators become manic. One bespectacled man drops down into his chair, wiping his brow. The Yakuza arranger picks up the man's camera and keeps on snapping.

A sort of twisted male bonding occurs as the men exchange horror stories while clicking away at the girls. The Yakuza talks about the death of a former model in a women's prison. One tells of hating his wife so much that he thinks about setting her on fire when she's asleep. Sweet.

Dressed in a riding outfit with high boots, a tall blonde American strikes a dominant stance. The admiring Yakuza tells her, "You look especially good today." Nanami wears a traditional Japanese robe. The blonde and Nanami play out vari-

ous combat scenarios, some hand-to-hand, some sporting weapons. They end with Nanami choking the blonde in a simulated snuff scene. The whole thing excites the Yakuza so much that he collapses drunk after it's over, the camera following his chess-piece fall.

Shun has been peeking at the entire proceeding, close-ups of his face revealing a mixture of arousal and angst. He daydreams about the scenes the next day. The blonde and Nanami twist each other's nipples in slow motion, to a soundtrack of white noise. This all adds to his mental confusion. Shun shows up at the next camera club meeting, this time on a freezing beach, where the women pose on rocks. The blonde remarks to Nanami, "Your admirer is here again." After this session, Nanami is so bruised up that she decides to stop working for the camera club. The sex worker survival instinct is also telling her to avoid the bearded Yakuza.

Although her job inures Nanami to jealousy, Shun is disturbed and ragingly jealous. He feels hurt when they're eating at a noodle shop and Nanami asks her former high school classmate, Algebra—the beloved class egghead—to join them. Algebra invites the two to his school to see a short film he has made. Shun resists at first, but is very moved when he sees Algebra's movie, *First Love,* an ode to a girl he loved. Algebra seems a proxy for director Susumu Hani. Shun enthusiastically calls it beautiful, asking Algebra if he'd ever shown it to the girl. "I wish she was here today for me to show it to her," he replies, sadly. Shun looks affectionately at Nanami, exuberantly declaring, "This is first love!" They agree to meet at a hotel the following day.

Shun meets the little girl, Naomi, in the park, but avoids any questionable play with her. Suddenly, he has a bizarre vision of nude little boys and girls wearing Kabuki masks running through the park, toward the camera, as if they were spirits Shun had released.

Shun shaves, admiring himself narcissistically before his date with Nanami. Shun's stepfather starts in with the abuse again, feeling him up. Shun shoves him away. The stepfather shouts, "Get out! Probably end up a delinquent!"

On his way to the hotel Shun is confronted by the Yakuza and his thuggish buddies. "Remember Nanami, the model from the camera club? Can you tell us how to reach her?" Shun runs and they follow in hot pursuit through the crowded streets, leading to the film's *Fleshpot on 42nd Street*–like ending: Shun is struck dead by a car as Nanami watches sadly from the hotel window.

*Nanami* is believable and moving as a love story, realistically portraying the complex mental and social baggage its protagonists carry. Its expressionistic and intense camera club scene is one of the most remarkable in film, typifying a certain type of S&M that Japan specialized in during the 1960s and early 1970s, mixing Asian, Eurasian, and powerfully built blonde, blue-eyed models. *Nanami* is also one of the few movies to give the audience the vicarious experience of attending a paid S&M performance, bringing out their hyperreal mental dynamics and physical pain. In these scenes, and throughout *Nanami,* you see director Susumu Hani inventing a fresh cinematic vocabulary.

By the early 1970s, the genre of Sergio Leone–style spaghetti westerns (and exploitation variants like Al Adamson's uneven S&M/violence-spiced *Five Bloody Graves*) was becoming as unsatisfying a diet for the Deuce audience as the 50¢ "westernbergers" sold next to the Harris Theater. A new exploitation format was desperately needed to fill the void, and the Deuce audience found it in kung fu films. These films would entertain grindhouse audiences for years, influence American exploitation films, and eventually have a cultural ripple effect that crested in the mainstream almost three decades later.

The classic kung fu movie was a heady concoction of relatively opulent, foreign-tasting production values, morality-play theology, and action scenes that presented fights like recurrent daydreams. After the advent of the kung fu movie, Times Square never needed another western again, unless it was a porno oddity like *A Dirty Western* (1975) or a revival of Bob Cresse's psychodramatic sex western, *Hot Spur* (1968, but a perennial Deuce revival).

The kung fu movies were period pieces, but the characters wore trippy, exotic clothing and fought it out in balletic moves. The plots inevitably hinge on vengeance, but the heroes follow a code of honor not unlike Malcolm X's version of Islam: Stern masters put the heroes through the harshest rigors, only lending themselves as physical and emotional support after the students have proved themselves worthy human beings. The fight sequences are extremely intense, showcasing hypnotic movement that inevitably explodes into bloody, explicit death matches.

At the genre's peak in the mid-to-late 1970s, hundreds of kung fu movies were hitting the Deuce each year, and each grindhouse worked them into their fare. The whole kung fu look became a fashion statement, with karate robes, "Ninja"

T-shirts, and China-bowl hats becoming frequent sights around the Deuce—it wasn't unusual to see a dude decked out in an entire black belt's outfit, holding lethal silver balls and nunchaks. As you walked down 42nd Street, you could often hear Carl Douglas's one-hit-wonder song "Kung Fu Fighting" booming from ghetto blasters.

Kung fu movies lent themselves to the manic enthusiasm of the Deuce crowd, which reacted like spectators at a Roman gladiator fight. The films attracted a large inner city audience, but no matter your ethnic group, you'd be rooting for the hero and booing the villains. It wasn't the size that counted with the heroes. They were often thin, wiry guys with enormous gymnastic skills, who could kill with their bare hands.

Asian fans were already familiar with the kung fu movie from their native lands, so they were glad to have access to them in Times Square—though they weren't always aware of what they were getting into. Racist black robbers often assumed Asian men carried large sums of hidden gambling money. During the screenings, two muggers would take seats on either side of their intended victim, then grab his arms holding him in place. One of the robbers would flash a pocket knife or razor. Audience members who noticed knew it was some sort of shakedown in which they would not want to get involved. The mark would quickly turn over his money and the assailants would beat it to cop their drug fixes or hide out in the Anco. The unfortunate victim would often be too terrified to leave his seat immediately. When he did, he sometimes stood in front of the theater immobilized, apprehensive that the muggers were among the throngs of street people walking up and down the Deuce.

From 1973 until their closing in the late 1980s, The Cine 1 and 2 Theaters satisfied the taste of Times Square with a barrage of kung fu hits. The Cine Twins had been erected in the 1960s (making them babies next to such ancient grindhouses as the New Amsterdam, next door) and were located on the southeast end of 42nd Street and 7th Avenue, adjacent to Blackjack Books, one of the Deuce's freakiest adult bookstores, infamous for its cheap rough-trade hustlers and explicit live S&M show.

Although not as large as their neighboring showcases, the Cine Twins still featured lengthy, rectangular auditoriums and balconies. The strategic arrangement of the well-patrolled lobby and an impossibly bewildering back stairwell made

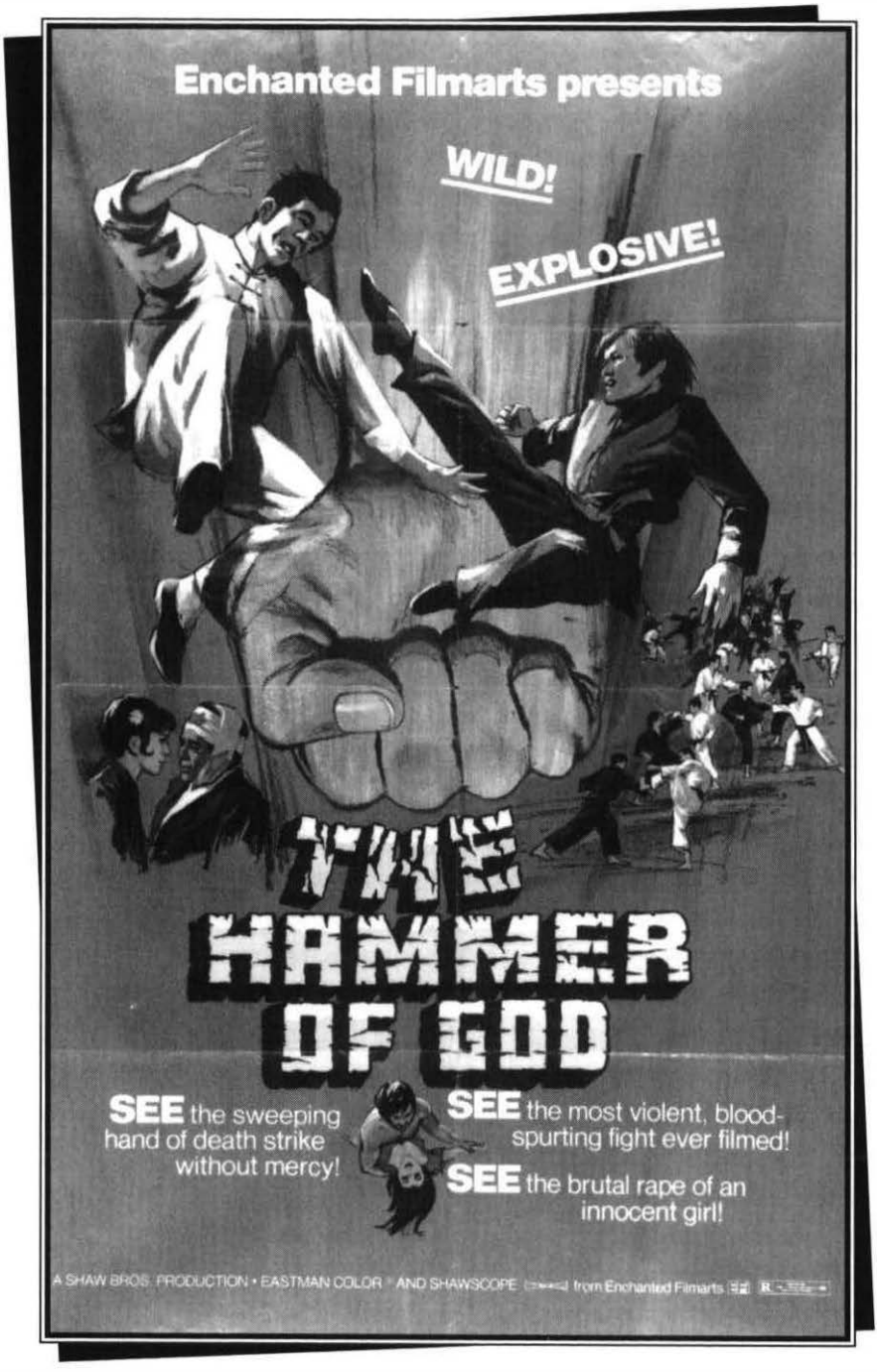
hopping between the two theaters all but impossible. In between features, the projectionist would play recent top-40 hits like Michael Jackson's "Don't Stop Till You Get Enough" over the sound system.

Inevitably, somebody would be getting high smoking angel dust, which has a distinct chemical stink that seems buried in incense. Patrons were wary of the sickly sweet aroma that would occasionally waft through the auditorium—no one wanted to be near a potential crazy outburst, or breathe it in and have an involuntary bad trip. And no one wanted to be kicked when the dusthead got too into the movie and let loose with some deranged chop-socky missteps of his own.

The kung fu genre's first widely embraced good time was *Five Fingers of Death* (1973), which opened at the Cine 1 and went on to be one of its most welcome second features. As in many kung fu movies, plucky hero Georgie Ho (Lieh Lo) miraculously kicks the ass of tougher wrongdoers, accomplishing this impossible feat through intense spiritual devotion and rigorous physical training. A kind of magic suspended the audience's disbelief. You want to believe that with enough devotion and dedication, good *can* triumph over evil. Of course, in real life, this is rarely the case, especially in the inner city.

While most kung fu movies stand out as pure, visceral entertainment, savvy distributors would sometimes throw on a double-entendre title like *Dirty Ho* (1979), knowing its amusement value for grindhouse denizens. *Hammer of God* (1973) offered the most hallucinatory visuals, plus such ultraviolence as its concluding widescreen geyser of blood, which splashes from one end of the screen to another. *Flying Guillotine* (1974) and its sequel inevitably tossed a bloody head or limb at the camera. The guillotine itself looked like a larger version of those battery-powered plastic fans sold to subway riders during Manhattan summers. Angela Mao, with her pristine looks and lightning moves, wooed 42nd Street with *Deadly China Doll* (1973). Not only did kung fu movies render irrelevant the racial tensions inherent in American-made action movies, they frequently presented strong heroines (like Angela) who were tougher than the guys.

*Enter the Dragon* (1973), a well-produced international spy thriller with expertly staged action sequences, was considered state of the art by fans, and became a Cine Twin second-feature staple through which audiences would sit again and again. Released by Warner Bros. (in another case of Hollywood jumping on the exploitation gravy train), the film starred John Saxon, black karate champ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The most intense and spectacular kung fu movie to play the Deuce; another faux R rating. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)

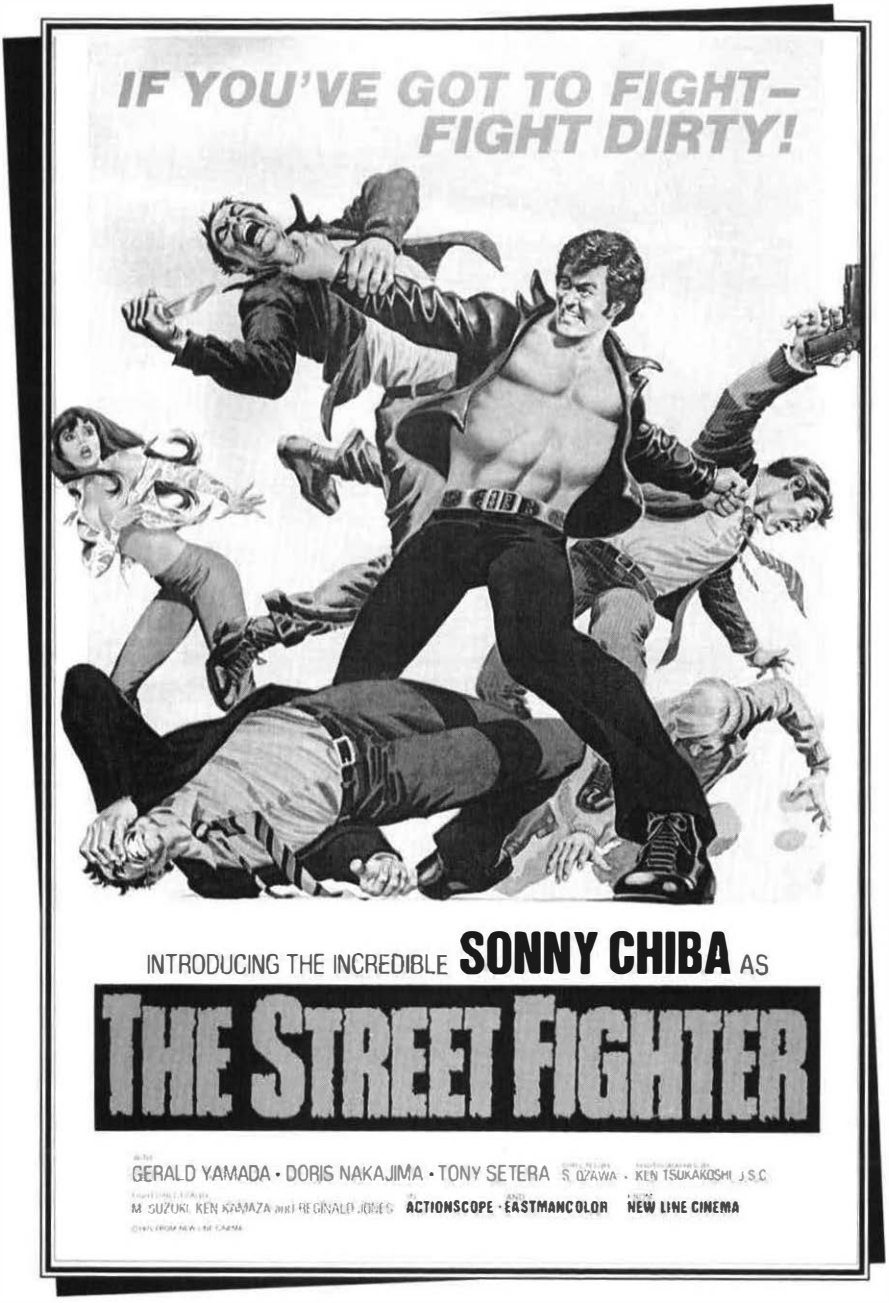
Jim Kelly, and the legendary Bruce Lee, who KO's literally hundreds of goons during the final scene before engaging in an edge-of-the-seat showdown with the main villain, staged in a hall of mirrors. The film made Lee the first worldwide kung fu superstar, though he'd died a month before it was released. As Lee's icon status grew, so did the myths that attempted to explain his mysterious death, which ranged from the commonplace (death from a drug overdose) to a strange legend of Lee revealing secret fighting techniques in a film and a vengeful Chinese gang giving him a death blow that later caused brain hemorrhage.

After Lee's passing, Deuce audiences were treated to a 1980 double-bill revival of *Fists of Fury* (1971) and *The Chinese Connection* (1972), two Raymond Chow productions that had originally helped popularize the kung fu genre. In *Fury,* honest laborer Lee is pitted against dope-dealing bosses who are smuggling heroin in corpses. In *Connection,* Bruce is pitted against bigoted, vicious Japanese invaders in prewar Shanghai. These workmanlike productions are consistently entertaining, including good fight sequences leavened by unintentionally funny moments, like the scene in *Fury* where Lee finds the bags of dope hidden in the dead bodies. Lee's intense and self-consciously serious presence is charismatic, giving the movies their strong centrifugal force.

When it was finally released in 1979, *Game of Death,* the production during which Lee died, featured the master's head superimposed over stand-ins to complete the action. While not as spellbinding as Lee's classic works, the movie did draw fans with its gripping death-match scene between Bruce and gigantic basketball champ Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

Bruce Lee's legend spawned a series of cheap repro actors with names like Bruce Le, Bruce Li, and Bruce Liu, none of whom recaptured his box office magic. Instead, Lee's big kung fu successor was the more mercenary, contemporary, violent (and Japanese) Sonny Chiba, whose *The Street Fighter* (1979) gave ultraviolence a new meaning. In homage to 42nd Street's new action king, "Chiba" even became Deuce argot for nickel bags of pot.

Sonny was a big guy who looked like he was perpetually sucking on a sourball. In *The Street Fighter,* he plays a freelance enforcer and bodyguard with an attendant and companion named Ratnose, an effete, slightly dimwitted former boy prostitute he'd rescued in Singapore. Deuce crowds would dismiss Ratnose early on with, "He's a fuckin' punk!" The boss villain of the picture is the equally sour-


IF YOU'VE GOT TO FIGHT—
FIGHT DIRTY!
INTRODUCING THE INCREDIBLE SONNY CHIBA AS
THE STREET FIGHTER
GERALD YAMADA • DORIS NAKAJIMA • TONY SETERA
S. OZAWA • KEN TSUKAKOSHI J.S.C.
M. SUZUKI KEN KAMAZA and REGINALD JONES
ACTIONSCOPE • EASTMANCOLOR
NEW LINE CINEMA

The most revoltingly violent of the martial arts films, *The Street Fighter*, well earned its X rating. The Deuce honored its star, Sonny Chiba, a brutal man afraid of nothing, by dubbing nickel bags of weed "Chiba." (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)

faced Junjo (Masashi Ishibashi), and the conflict between them—a nonstop barrage of castrations, men flung out skyscraper windows, and Yakuzas buying girls and shooting them full of heroin—makes the whole film play out like an electrical current running through your spine. In one technical highlight, we see a quick X-ray view of Sonny smashing an opponent's skull. By the conclusion of *The Street Fighter,* Sonny is full of enough bullet holes and stab wounds to put any normal person in the hospital indefinitely, but he still has enough strength to battle Junjo, ripping out his vocal cords and presenting them in close-up in the grand finale.

*The Street Fighter* was one of the first kung fu movies to be officially rated X. In its inimitable no-fun way, the MPAA explained its decision to the Sunday *New York Times* by presenting a still depicting a man with a gun held to his head. New Line, which distributed the film, used the infectious catch-line "If you've got to fight—FIGHT DIRTY." *New York* magazine critic Judith Crist gave *The Street Fighter* a backhanded compliment by saying that after seeing it, viewers wouldn't be able to eat for a week.

In *Return of the Street Fighter* (1975), Junjo returns with an electrolarynx to compensate for his torn-out vocal cords, and the movie is padded with flashbacks from the previous film. *Sister Street Fighter* (1976) was another cash-in on this successful series. Terry Levine's Aquarius Films even made its own Sonny Chiba cheapie, *The Bodyguard* (1976), which includes some location footage of local Times Square kung fu gyms. The trailer—which was better than the film—was set to a background chant of "VIVA CHIBA!"

In Hong Kong, the Shaw Brothers—Run Run and Runme—made some of the most popular and entertaining kung fu movies to play the Deuce, like *Five Deadly Venoms* (1978), which was shot in "Shawscope" (i.e. widescreen). As a new wrinkle, the eponymous villains have perfected combat styles based on snakes, scorpions, and other venomous creatures. The revenge-bent hero learns from his master that the Venoms keep their identities secret, hiding behind masks and only using their techniques in emergencies, so he sets out to reveal their true identities before they kill again. It's a strikingly vivid movie employing psychedelic Asian colors and costumes, and featuring breathtaking fight sequences.

Offbeat Shaw Brothers productions that made it to 42nd Street included *The Seven Brothers Meet Dracula* (1974), which included British horror stalwart

Peter Cushing within a kung fu setting. The film eventually played backup to, of all things, Doris Wishman's gendertwist classic *Let Me Die a Woman.* The Shaw Brothers also produced the eternally popular, mean-spirited Chinese women's prison movie *Bamboo House of Dolls* (1974). Although not as strong as *The Big Doll House* or *The Big Bird Cage,* it still had such satisfying S&M sequences as the heroines tied to wooden stakes on the ground. Eventually, there's a big bust-out, and the theme song "Bamboo House of Dolls," which is as absurd as the Five Keys's "Ling Ting Tong," plays like a mantra throughout the trailer and movie.

The Shaw Brothers brought Chinese supernatural films to the Deuce that would normally have run only in ethnic, foreign-language theaters around Chinatown. Their infamous *Killer Snakes* (1975), which was rated X for violence, concerned a creep taking revenge on his enemies using snakes. *Black Magic* (1975) is a convoluted horror tale involving various uses and misuses of black magic to lead characters into sex or death. Its overpowering visual style compensates for its occasionally slow pace, and there are some hilarious scenes. Selected delights include a white magician deafening a black one by playing a flute, people puking parasites when spells are broken, and some poor sap being fed leeches to break a curse that's been thrown on him.





*Black Magic II* (1976) is even better. It shares the same basic plot—an evil sorcerer misuses black magic, and you see the sexual and other effects his spells have on the protagonists—yet the film is jam-packed with bizarre scenes. For example, the sorcerer stores dead bodies that he turns into youthful-appearing zombies by driving a stake through their hands and then pulling it out again. To stay looking 25 even though he's over 80, he has to drink human milk each day. To ensure he'll get a donor for this offbeat request, he impregnates one of the heroines, who gives birth to a monster baby. In a Mondo-style fakir moment, the sorcerer also drives stakes through his own hands and cheeks. Compared to the original *Black Magic,* the pacing is better, the sex is explicit and frequent, the production values are top-notch, and the movie has a savvy exploitation style.

Transcontinental Films' *Mad Monkey Kung Fu* (1979) became one of the most enduring of the Cine Twins' offerings, playing years after its initial run as a beloved second feature. Hired to do a kung fu demonstration at a local brothel, the hero gets blasted on the abundant free wine and makes a drunken fool of him-

self. The evil owner (Lo Lieh, the heavy in innumerable kung fu movies) breaks his hands and kidnaps his sister, forcing her into prostitution.

Our hero is reduced to doing an organ grinder act with a monkey for the spare change the townspeople toss at him. Lieh's extortionist goons, who bully the village, shake him down. The hero hooks up with an impish young fellow who steals money from the extortionists as they're collecting it. When the gangsters kill the hero's monkey, the young guy dons a costume and impersonates the monkey in the act, then learns the secrets of monkey boxing from his older companion. After hearing that the hero's sister has been killed, the two men successfully raid Lieh's compound, killing or disabling most of the villains. Music from *Taxi Driver* is shamelessly lifted during the climactic fight sequences. The production values of *Mad Monkey Kung Fu* are excellent, and the movie keeps its promise to the audience, being constantly exciting, well shot, action packed, and filled with novel plot twists.

Noting the success of films from the Far East, Roger Corman's New World Pictures hired David Weisman, who directed the Warhol/Edie Sedgwick quasi-documentary *Ciao Manhattan,* to rethink and Americanize the "baby cart" movie, a subgenre that meditates on the sanctity of the parent-child relationship, and features a parent forced to expose the child to a violent part of his personality (as in the Euro-westerns *El Topo* or *Cutthroats 9*). The film that resulted, *Shogun Assassin* (1980), features a relentlessly grim, never-sleeping hero who wheels his infant son around in a stroller armed with swords. The dishonest warlord who once employed him sends killers to do him in, but the shogun hero becomes even more resolute and difficult to defeat because his son's life depends on him. Weisman successfully made the movie grindhouse-friendly with effective synthesizer music, intelligent dubbing (with the infant son narrating the events), and some cuts for quicker pacing.

New Line Cinema got accustomed to bad taste through distributing John Waters's work, so it didn't balk at releasing the freak-exploitation movie *The Crippled Masters* (1981), starring grown-up Thalidomide babies who were born with flippers instead of arms.

From elsewhere in Asia, Filipino movies had been Deuce mainstays since the 1960s, when the sadomasochistic *Brides of Blood* was a popular feature. The re-

markable *Blind Rage* (1978) effortlessly blended action-adventure, kung fu, and blaxploitation, hitting big during its 1970s first run and becoming a beloved second and third feature that ran until the grindhouses were closing—transcending Orientalia to become one of the ultimate grindhouse action films. It has a storyline straight out of an airport paperback thriller, and location work that takes you to low-rent parts of Manila, Hong Kong, L.A., and Las Vegas.

Four blind men are hired by an enigmatic Filipino mastermind to rob a bank. As revealed in flashbacks, three of the men are thugs who have been blinded by other criminals they've ripped off. The fourth is a Vegas magician who was born sightless. The men plan for the job by tapping their canes through a plywood replica of the bank's interior. They're supervised by a chunky mamasita in tight, hip-hugger slacks, whose presence gives these training sessions a curious dominance undertone. When our sunglassed protagonists execute the actual heist, it devolves quickly into chaos: Since the thieves can't see, they shoot at any sound.



*Blind Rage* strikes a mellow groove because it's propelled by a bizarre premise rather than any grisly violence or cheap shocks. The settings are overpoweringly seedy and sun-drenched, and the repetitive, bass-driven music makes the film relaxing during the exposition and springs it back up for the action. A terrific cast of exploitation stalwarts plays the blind men. *Dolemite* director D'Urville Martin costars with kung fu superstar Leo Fong, who also produced the film. Blaxploitation icon Fred Williamson makes a cameo as Jesse Crowder, a private eye persona he's used in other actionramas, before and since.



*Blind Rage* knocked all over the Deuce, from the relatively tight Cine 1 and 2 to the spacious Empire. In either setting, it was welcomed by the audience, either in the summer with the A/C blasting or the winter, when its tropical locations would lull everyone in and out of a relaxed sleep. It was the perfect movie to mellow out to with a good joint.



Cirio Santiago's movies presented the Deuce audience with many Filipino-concocted Cuban-Chinese cinematic treats. In 1946, Santiago's father founded Premiere Productions, the Philippines' largest film studio. Cirio still runs Premiere today, effectively making him the top producer in the country. In the 1970s, he worked on many American-financed exploitation productions and action-adventure films, producing and directing such Filipino women's prison classics as

*Women in Cages.* Even though he lived on the other side of the world, Santiago instinctively knew the Deuce audience's hunger for action. You could walk in at any time during any point of his movies, settle into your seat, relax, and enjoy it.

Santiago's *Savage* (1973) starred James Igelhart (best known to cult audiences for his role as the Muhammad Ali parody "Randy Black" in *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls*) and is such a Möbius strip of shoot 'em up scenes that you're never quite certain where the movie begins or ends. In Santiago's *The Hustler Squad* (1976), a group of women are sent behind enemy lines during World War II, and the only one who survives is a nurse with terminal cancer. It's a fast-paced thriller, a distaff *Dirty Dozen,* and has real emotional resonance: You genuinely care about the characters' fates.

Santiago's most remarkable, constantly energetic film is *The Muthers* (1976), about a group of modern-day female pirates who rip off tourist ships. One is captured and sent to a hellish prison farm where hanging by the hair and forced labor are the order of the day. The prison camp is run by a monstrous bisexual, who isn't above taking a young boy as a sex partner between torture sessions with his female prisoners. After he's abused the women to his liking, he sells them to an evil pimp. The heroine's two comrades infiltrate the camp, and, as in many of Santiago's movies, good triumphs over evil in the end.

In *The Muthers,* grindhouse queen Jayne Kennedy plays the warden's girlfriend, who eventually turns on him and helps the inmates. With her incredible looks and great sense of cool, Jayne was many a Deuce patron's dream squeeze. She had a history in show business dating back thirty years, to when she was crowned Miss Ohio. Diverse gigs followed, including a stint as a Golddigger on *The Dean Martin Show,* innumerable appearances on other popular TV shows, and even a spot as the only female sportscaster in the male-dominated NFL. But it was Jayne's Filipino action movies that made her a goddess on the Deuce. With an actress like Pam Grier, you were afraid she had a knife hidden in her cheek, but everyone in the audience loved Jayne. She had class.

Santiago used Jayne, her hubby Leon Isaac Kennedy, and James Igelhart for *Death Force* (1978), which also played the Deuce under a slew of other titles, including *Fighting Mad.* Leon and James are army buddies from 'Nam—until Leon burns James over a shipment of dope, tosses him into the ocean, and leaves him

for dead. However, James is rescued by an old Japanese soldier who refuses to believe World War II is over and who teaches his new companion the ancient art of swordsmanship.

Back in L.A., Jayne is a nightclub singer. After she belts out a number, Leon tries to put the make on her, using every sleazy pickup move in the book. It's a really weird acting situation, considering they were a married couple at the time. James comes back, sword in hand, to make things right. *Death Force* features voluminous swordplay, and the charisma of Jayne and Leon virtually flies off the screen.

Leon became immortalized on 42nd Street with his performance as prison boxer "Too Sweet" in *Penitentiary* (1979). He also had a well-publicized freebasing problem, which is described in his friend Smokey Robinson's autobiography. Leon eventually brought Smokey to a religious cure that freed them of the pipe.

Santiago's last grindhouse entry was the wildly silly *Firecracker* (1981), whose funniest scene has the hero and heroine kung fu kicking each other into the sack.



During the 1990s and into the first decade of the 21st century, Orientalia exerted its influence on such filmmakers as Quentin Tarantino, who explicitly acknowledged it in films like *Reservoir Dogs,* and has even revived the *Street Fighter* series on videotape in all its uncut glory. Elsewhere, rap bands like Wu Tang Clan have taken their names and attitude from the kung fu hits they saw as kids on the Deuce, and later in cut versions on local New York stations like WNEW, channel 5.

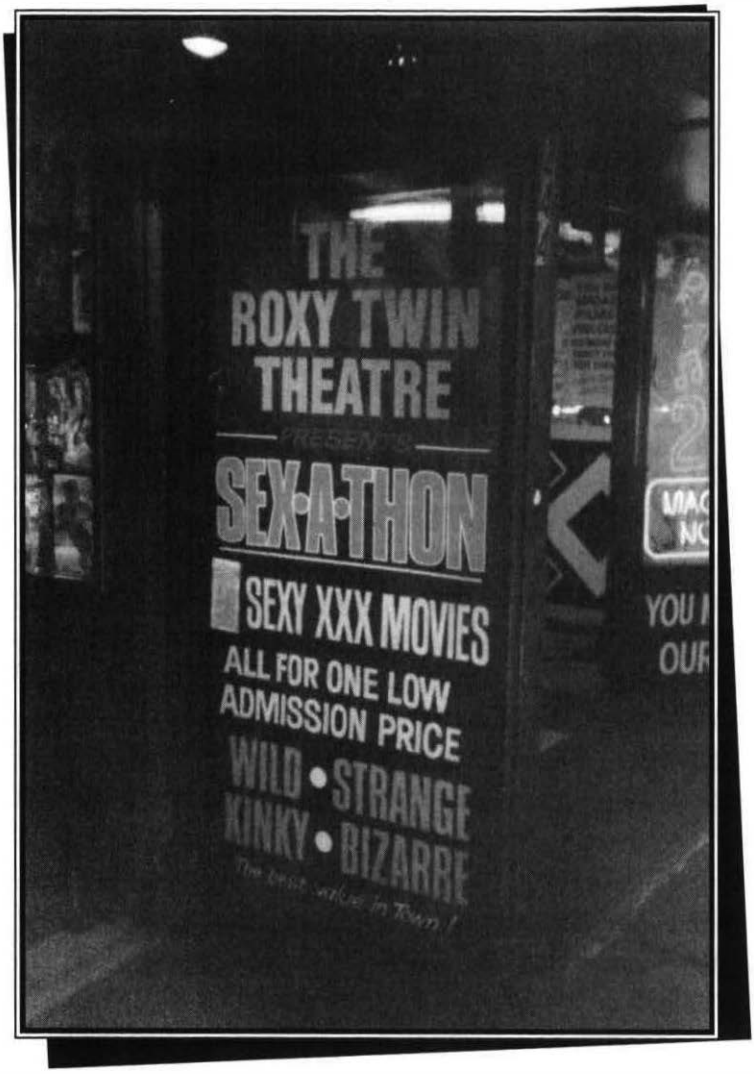
Recently, Jackie Chan has taken Sonny Chiba's modern look and toned down his violence with such mainstream hits as *Rush Hour.* Chan is even an animated figure on a Saturday morning kids' TV show, although Baby Sleazoid found him lacking when compared to the creative gymnastics she saw in *Five Deadly Venoms.*

# thirteen
# Lost in the Roxy

**The Roxy theater had several incarnations, but all of them were pretty foul.** Located on the south side of the street next to the Cine Twins, it was originally one of the Deuce's grungiest, most pungent smelling, and most dangerous adult houses. Sharing management with the landmark scumatorium Show World, the Roxy spent the 1970s through the mid-1980s showing third-run hardcore porn, hosting a live sex show, and serving as an open stomping ground for quickie prostitution. It attracted the worst, most desperate people on the Deuce. You didn't even stand near the theater unless you wanted a drug addict streetwalker propositioning you as her pimp/live-show partner hung over your shoulder.

In the early to mid-1980s, rare Deuce favorites that had been gone for years were suddenly accessible again because of video, and distributors who hadn't shown some movies in years suddenly saw dollar signs. In 1985, the Roxy was renovated and converted into a multileveled fourplex that showed exploitation double bills on video, becoming a sort of living *Sleazoid* museum. You could catch every sort of film from every year, including many rough-girl gems from the 1970s, like *Fugitive Girls* and the Arthur Marks classics *Roommates* and *Centerfold Girls*. There were bookings so dissimilar only the Deuce could conceive them, like *Superman* (1978) and *Superfly* (1972). Unfortunately, despite the renovation, the Roxy remained devoid of fresh air and retained both its BO aroma and its super-sleazy vibe. Sometimes you'd see the Roxy cashiers—former live-show workers with names like Duran—run into a broom closet with a crack pipe during their breaks.

To walk into one of the Roxy's mini-theaters meant walking into any number of crazy scenes or insane outbursts. You'd see Laura Gemser getting violated by




The Roxy Theater in its final and foulest incarnation. (Photo: Michelle Clifford)

her real-life husband, Gabriele Tinti, in *Smooth Silk and Raw Velvet* after she participates in a sex magick ceremony at the Sphinx. (The movie was a legendary Eurosleaze classic that you'd have been lucky to catch when it was first released in 1977.) Or maybe you'd see Victor Buono screaming at you while rearranging an *Alice in Wonderland* style tea party in the horror oddity *Moonchild* (1974), unable to get it together—something about the guests not sitting where he wanted.

You never knew what movie you were walking into. You'd have to stand there for a few minutes to figure it out.

If you stood too long, though, people would start to surround you, thinking you were looking for a possible sex partner or were just stupid and asking to be robbed. So it was wise to take one of the ass-numbing plastic seats anyway if you weren't sure, then figure it out. But before you sat down, you'd have to flick a lighter at the seat to make sure there was no weird wet mess on it.

Once seated, you could easily imagine Victor marching off the screen to tell you to move your chair, as the rest of the cast shouted at you that they hated it there and wanted out of Times Square. People smoked everything openly in the audience, from nauseating Kools to cheap psychotic crack, those scary angel dust smokers puffing along with the weedheads sprinkled liberally throughout the crowd. Whether it was summer or winter, the air conditioning was always blasting, which turned the experience of watching a double feature into a prolonged icebox torture session, and was downright painful if you came in out of the rain. The video-projected image was adequate, but sometimes the speakers would be turned up so loud that the walls would be shaking and the thin plastic seats vibrating—you could hear the screaming from the film next door bleed through the walls. These pressure points of discomfort seemed to be the theater's only method of discouraging sleepers and crashers—the kind of guys who would normally inhabit all-night porno houses like 8th Avenue's Venus Theater or the Harem Theater on the north end of the Deuce. These theaters were starting to close, though, and the sleepers needed new crash pads.

You might flee again to another mini whose A/C wasn't working at all and whose stale atmosphere reeked of Kools, cheap cologne, and BO, but changing mini-theaters in the Roxy was a challenge. The theater had an intricate maze layout, with stairwells that went up a flight, then down a flight, leading to one of the four mini-theaters or sometimes to a door you'd open only to find yourself behind a screen. The hallways were tiny and claustrophobic, and you had to keep a Pac-Man pace in the stairwell—if you allowed yourself to be dominated into even noticing people, it was their cue to rape and take.

The Roxy bathrooms were a real Port Authority affair to be avoided at all costs. The men's room stank of urine and had filthy newspapers stuck all over the floor, and you never knew if someone might be passed out or doing drugs in a stall.

The ladies' room had three stalls, each filthier than the next. Bloody tampons, thrown in menstrual whore rages, were stuck to the ceiling and walls next to bathetic love graffiti from delusional crackhead streetwalkers. The place reeked of week-old dead carp.

After drinking too much Pepsi-Cola and bracing herself against the Roxy's frigid temperatures, Mrs. Sleazoid found that the theater worked a demanding mojo on her bladder. The elderly Puerto Rican candy-stand man on the second floor was gentleman enough to let her step into the employee's restroom next to the popcorn stand. At this point, the job of projectionist was being eliminated from many grindhouses—a trend started by adult theaters on 8th Avenue like the Eros—so this man's job also involved switching the videos in the popcorn stand's four constantly playing videotape machines, which fed to the four theaters. The second floor gave a perfect overview of 42nd Street, and the candy man didn't mind Mrs. Sleazoid taking a breather from the films to sit on the windowsill and watch the walking, slinking, preening, and promenading denizens of the Deuce go by. It was like being inserted into a postcard come to life, dreamy in the overcast drizzle like a swirling acid trip. The hothouse summer heat always offered something compelling to look at. It was a moving Egyptian mural of the Deuce.



The Roxy was a fitting home for the inner city movies that were time-tested Deuce classics. With character archetypes plucked right from 42nd Street, these movies harped on socially inappropriate tenderloin storylines involving prostitution, live sex show work, drug dealing, pimping, illegal fighting, and gambling. They featured the kind of blue humor that you employ when vice is what you live, see, and breathe every waking hour. The films were as inflexible and distinct as the troublemakers sitting in the audience.

The Roxy revived the original trendsetter of the inner city flick, *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971), in which writer-director-star Melvin Van Peebles shows how expendable a vice worker's life really is—a frightening situation that many of the Deuce denizens could identify with. "Rated X by an all white jury" proclaimed (and complained) the film's famous tag line when it originally hit grindhouse screens. Distributor Jerry Gross and director Van Peebles couldn't talk the MPAA into changing the rating—though they tried—but it did get them a sassy ad line that was noticed in the papers and remembered.

Sweetback, the hero of the film, is a performer in a live sex show, an occupa-

tion specific only to the Deuce and the country's other most extreme vice districts, including the section of L.A. where the film is set. Live shows had first gotten popular at the close of the 1960s at Deuce theaters like the Hollywood on 8th Avenue, the Roxy (incarnation 1) and the Avon theater chain. Shows were billed as half-hour attractions, but the sex usually lasted only twenty to twenty-five minutes. A spotlight would beam down on the naked stage to indicate things were about to get going. To kick things off, the woman would do a quick strip and then hop on a dirty mattress and gyrate for the audience. Her partner would then join her for a Kama Sutra–style carnal display of pussy eating, cocksucking, and straight fucking with some position changes. The show usually ended when the climaxing male shot semen all over his costar. The shows were accompanied by a cut-and-paste pastiche of taped music that the couple had made for themselves—usually cock-pumping velour-soul hits like Ray Parker's "Jack and Jill," Lionel Richie's "You Are the Sun, You Are the Rain," and McFadden and Whitehead's "Ain't No Stoppin' Us Now."

Melvin Van Peebles is regarded as the godfather of black film. He demonstrated promising potential with his early work *Story of a 3-Day Pass* (1968), an experimentally tinged yet traditional narrative movie about a black soldier's romance with a white French girl. This enabled him to make *Watermelon Man* (1970) for Columbia. A parable about running from your own identity, the film stars Godfrey Cambridge as a manic white office worker who wakes up black one day. Van Peebles then made *Sweetback* as his own low-budget affair. He later wrote a book about the making of the film, describing how he assembled a crew of union people working on the sly, plus nonunion people recruited from skinflicks and the exploitation business. He claims the budget of the film was $500,000, but it was much lower—at one point he was down to his last $13, and only a $50,000 check from Bill Cosby allowed him to keep the production afloat.

In *Sweetback*'s opening scene, a child (director Melvin's son Mario) is overwhelmed by hookers smiling at him (some with garish sunglasses) at the whorehouse where he lives. As the kid puts towels in front of a hooker's room, she takes him in, takes off her clothes and then his, and pulls him into position on top of her. When the silent child just sits there like a dead fish, she insists, "You ain't at the photographer's. You ain't getting your picture taken! . . . . MOVE!"

This scene dissolves into one of Melvin as the grown-up Sweetback fucking a

woman, then to a whorehouse live show, where Sweetback is the star stud. Introduced by a drag queen calling herself "the good black fairy godmother," the show is a mass of gender confusion, with two women—one impersonating an old man with a cane, glue-on beard, and dildo—teamed with Sweetback.

Beetle, the pimp who runs the house, is a chubby faggot who spends his off hours in bed, wearing a hair net and toying with his pet cat and rabbit. During Sweetback's performance, two cops pressure Beetle: They need to take in a token suspect because of a recent murder, and promise to release Sweetback the next day. Beetle is shorthanded and doesn't want to do it—he needs the dependable Sweetback around for the performances. The live show concludes with the drag queen announcing, "As a special added attraction, if one of you young ladies would like to step up and *try* this gentleman . . ." A white woman enthusiastically gets up, and as the cops frown, Beetle shakes his head, prompting the fairy godmother to note," "Uh. . . . this offer is only open to *sisters.*"



Once the show is over, Beetle has Sweetback brought to him, saying, "Go with these gentlemen for the evening." Sweetback stands fully clothed in his 70s velour outfit and wide-brimmed hat. "Hell of a show you guys put on," enthuses one of the pigs as they lead the handcuffed Sweetback to their unmarked car. Sweetback responds with the poker face he wears throughout the film, registering pessimism and complete disapproval of his surroundings. During most of the film, he says nothing.



En route to the station, the police respond to a radio call about a disturbance a couple blocks over, pick up a young Panther brother and cuff him and Sweetback together. When they uncuff Sweetback and begin beating up the radical, Sweetback snaps and breaks their heads like eggshells. This scene had audiences on 42nd Street cheering—in the tenderloin, vice cops are nobody's friends: They're miserable pieces of human debris that live off parasites.



The rest of *Sweetback* is the hero's flight, an odyssey through the black urban side of Los Angeles, where other societal outsiders aid his way to the Mexican border. Caught again by the cops, Sweetback manages to sneak away after a neighborhood riot breaks out. You see the neon of L.A. by night—all adult theaters, go-go joints, and a prominent recurring "Jesus Saves" sign, which seem selective as we see Sweetback's suffering and fright.

Jesus isn't shown actually saving anyone, especially at Sweetback's next stop,

a ghetto storefront church where a dashiki-clad minister is giving a funeral service for an overdose victim. "You can't hide here, Sweetback." Upstairs from the church is "The Farm," a place for unwed mothers that supplies Beetle with girls. A nude woman is glimpsed briefly, screaming on a filthy mattress.

Sweetback stops at a card game to get help from a pimp pal. After taking a snort, the pimp gives the film's best line: "Ain't nothing but a struggle from the womb to the tomb." He explains that since he's been shaken down by the police and the Italian and Jewish mobs, he has no money to offer Sweetback.

Sweetback presents his handcuffed wrists to a female friend, who demands "first things first." He fucks her obediently, silently, the handcuffs adding a kinky touch. Fucking done and handcuffs off, he hides in the toolshed of a motorcycle gang, where he's confronted and challenged by the gang's Amazon leader, Big Sadie. In one of the movie's most inspired, fantastic moments, Sweetback is given a choice of weapons and, instead of choosing wrestling or knives, simply challenges "fucking." Van Peebles knows how public sex performances can be the most intimidating challenge of all. Motorcycles rev. Extended fucking ensues, ending with the Amazon yelling out "OH! Sweetback!"

Sweetback begins his flight through the desert to the Mexican border. The cops stop at the foster home where Sweetback lived as a child. In one of the film's most wrenching moments, a seemingly illiterate caretaker repeats, "I might have had a Leroy once, but I can't rightly remember. When they get older and bad the county takes them away," in different angles, about ten times.

When questioned by the cops, a trio of with-it black and Latino queens says, "If you see him, send him here. . . . I'm a *militant* queen." Apropos of nothing, Van Peebles intercuts a startling Uncle Tom parody of a black shoeshine guy squatting on a whitey's shoes and shining them with his ass. But not all white people are depicted as creeps. The sex-freak bikers, a greaser ignoring the cops at a hamburger stand, and an old geezer who switches clothes with Sweetback to distract police helicopters all aid him in different ways.

The pre-fame Earth, Wind & Fire provide the theme song, sounding more like an acapella pre-rap group intoning "You bled my mama . . . you bled my papa . . . but you won't bleed me"—a line Van Peebles would use as the advertising catchphrase. The singers encourage the hero: "Run, Sweetback. Run, mutherfucker!" Sweetback's side splits open and he urinates on the sand, placing it on his wound

to cauterize it. Although deputies set police dogs after him, he still makes it to Mexico.

*Sweetback*'s power lies in its realistic depiction of the vice lifestyle, which made the viewing experience all too painfully real to Deuce and ghetto audiences across the country, even though the film had the emotional reassurance of a triumphant ending. It was a trendsetter whose morals transcended the genre that it begat, one that inspired many wannabes and big-budget blaxploitation movies. While turning a hefty profit, these later films came up aesthetically short by comparison.

While *Sweetback* went straight for the jugular in its depiction of tenderloin life, Rudy Ray Moore went the direct opposite direction, using its outrageous sexuality to elicit belly laughs. In his alter ego, "Dolemite," Moore was the king of toasts at the Roxy, part of a tradition of comics including Skillet & Leroy and Blowfly, who cut albums of their lowdown ghetto comedy club routines with titles like *Big Dead Dick* and *The Streaker.* These albums were notorious for their filthy cover artwork and audio content so blue and lacking in production values that they had no hope of reaching mainstream airplay. But they sold well in ghetto record shops and grocery stores across the nation, stacked next to the checkout counters of Pick 'n' Pays.





Rudy's live stand-up routine alternates between scathing traditional whorehouse jokes and blistering, incredibly humiliating sexual insults directed at his audience. Not unlike Don Rickles, Rudy swoops down like a one-man gang-bang, calling people out on their weight or looks, then focusing on the person's sexual repulsiveness until the entire room is laughing at the poor son of a bitch (who doesn't dare peep a word of complaint). What one recalls most from the gags is Rudy shouting "AND YOU FUCK LIKE A NIGGER, TOO!"

Moore started his career in the army, when someone asked him to tell a few jokes at a nightclub. He put out the first blue-humor black record, *Eat Out More Often* (1970), through Dolphin's Record Store in Hollywood. His material was so raunchy that airplay was ridiculously impossible, so Rudy sold his records city to city through word of mouth. On the cover of *I Can't Believe I Ate the Whole Thing,* he appears flanked by nude and natural sistahs. Rudy is physically out of shape but not afraid to flaunt it—bein' real always made him the funniest. Rudy's fe-

male partner-in-crime was the older, grizzled Lady Reed, who later recalled that she was so shy when she first went on stage that Rudy had to hold her hand.

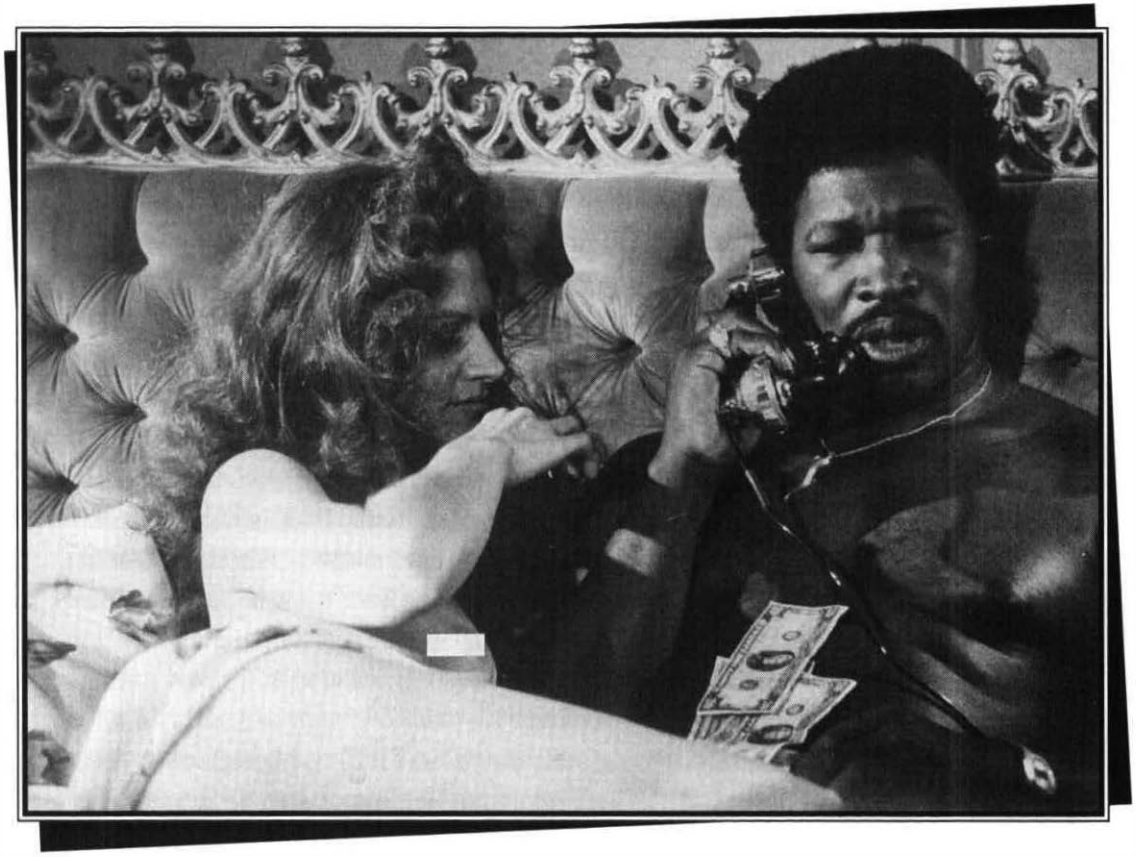
Rudy costarred with Reed in the funniest and most beloved black exploitation movie, *The Human Tornado* (1975), which became a regular Roxy replay. Rudy's Dolemite character was familiar to the Deuce audience: a gay black man who befriended female prostitutes and lived vicariously through them, getting sucked into the criminal drama, always conspiring in and sharing outrageously raunchy sexual episodes along the way. In this particular milieu, the man served the prostitute much like a lady in waiting, and in some more fetishistic instances was almost her house nigger. There were more than a few guys like Rudy at the Roxy and at certain adult movie houses, like the Venus over on 8th Avenue, since they were the cheapest clubhouses to have with your friends. You didn't have to buy drinks as you would in a bar. You could smoke joints or do your drugs pretty openly. You could just hang out and talk.

Like Rudy's albums, *The Human Tornado* is less straightforward narrative than a free-form series of dirty toasts and belly laughs. Rudy packs his considerable girth into a denim patchwork jumpsuit with matching tam, loud velour jackets with huge lapels, and striped highwater flairs. As rapper Ice-T has noted, "Dolemite was always crazy. . . . His clothes were always out of date." The opening pursuit scene has Rudy rolling buck naked down a steep dirt hill covered in brambles. Bouncing off rocks, dick flapping, he taunts, "I bet you muthafuckahs thought I didn't do that," and gives the flabbergasted audience an instant replay, rewinding the scene and playing it again for a repeat laugh.

The loose narrative framework has Dolemite pursued through Watts by a bigoted Okie sheriff as he tries to save his madam friend Queen Bee's nightclub from an imminent mob takeover and rescue her girls, who have been kidnapped. Rudy's below-the-belt comic attacks on audiences are unleashed as he MC's a talent contest within the film, which provides a startling array of chitlin circuit acts: fire-eaters, out-of-sync dancers, and the eye-popping Jimmy "Mr. Motion" Lynch. Armed with a fifteen-inch Afro and spangled jumpsuit, Jimmy steals the show with a swinging boogie dance that's like a preamble to a Tijuana live sex show.

Dolemite and his pals are far from being the ghetto-fabulous pimp/player/private eye archetypes. Nobody in his crew owns a car—they share cabs and bum

The original *Human Tornado* campaign. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)



Mrs. Cavaletti turns over some bread to Dolemite. (Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford Collection)

rides around L.A.—and all the sex in the film has a skewed tenderloin sensibility, and is played for parody and laughs. In one scene the spectacular Java—a seven-foot pre-op transsexual—appears as one of Queen Bee's kidnapped girls, tied up B&D style in a basement and sporting muscles and a bikini to show off her unnatural charms. In another, Dolemite gets it on with his big-titted old lady, Hurricane Annie, shaking his full flab as he and Annie operate exercise machines over their bed. The scene ends with Dolemite going south on Annie as her smiling glossed lips fill the screen.

In a particularly hysterical sequence, Dolemite seduces Mrs. Cavaletti, a Mafia kidnapper's wife. Resplendent in his mismatching polyesters, he pushes her front door buzzer and when she answers, introduces himself as Frank Delmonico Nicodemus, babbling to her in an overblown Haitian patois. He smiles and

hands her an oil-on-velvet painting depicting black love. Mrs. Cavaletti is instantly hypnotized, and drifts into a wet dream of Latino muscle men slowly climbing out of gigantic children's wooden blocks as a lullaby plays. Suddenly, Rudy's naked and balling Mrs. Cavaletti as the bed shakes and the room and ceiling literally collapse on them. Firework sparks fly off the debris, starting a fire. Rudy's friend, director Cliff Roquemore, shot the scene in the hotel room Rudy was living in at the time, accidentally destroying it in the process. Rudy was a known quantity when it came to giving it all for his art.

Roquemore also directed Rudy's folklore-derived *Petey Wheatstraw, the Devil's Son-in-Law* (1977), which is crammed with dirty party-record scenes that burst to life. Groups of nude women are arranged around Rudy in what looks like a whorehouse bedroom. Men clad in Halloween devil outfits pursue Rudy after he reneges on a pact with Lucifer. Rudy strolls through Watts using his magic cane to perform ghetto miracles like making a fat woman thin, transforming a nasty thug into a dog, and starting someone's broken-down car full of kids. He caps it off by joyfully leaping in the air in slow motion.



The last of Rudy's 70s movies, *Disco Godfather* (1979) is highlighted by Rudy standing under a cheap glitter ball, imploring "Put your weight on it!" over and over, sounding sexually desperate. The trailer was better than the film, but no matter how good or indifferent, Rudy's movies were always Roxy replays.



You didn't want to drop any soap in the Roxy men's room if one of Jamaa Fanaka's angry movies were playing. Obsessed with jail and those who had visited it, his films induced both laughs and unwanted flashbacks in the considerable portion of the Deuce audience who had been guests of the state. Fanaka's movies always hurled indelicate accusations at a brother's manhood. *Welcome Home, Brother Charles* (1976) plays out the phallic vengeance of a man falsely sent to jail for rape. He learns a voodoo secret, and puts himself into a trance. A giant prosthetic grows out of his crotch, which strangles his enemies, including the miserable old honky judge who had sent him up the river. In *Penitentiary* (1979), 42nd Street's favorite swinger, Leon Isaac Kennedy, winds up in the can where he's dubbed "Too Sweet" and must become a boxer to fight for his manhood, life, and early parole. Women from neighboring prisons are allowed to watch the matches and ball the male prisoners on the sly.



Fred Williamson was the inner city's B-level black action superstar, modeling

his spot in exploitation off the one Jim Brown once held in radical-chic Hollywood. In 1983, Mr. Sleazoid and Benny Torres, the bouncer at the Doll Theater, were thrilled to see Fred walking down 7th Avenue one day, smoking a cigar and checking out the marquee of his *One Down, Two to Go,* just after the movie had opened. Fred waved gregariously. Fred was a guy who appreciated his fans and who loved to see himself on the Deuce.

Fred had a private-eye persona called Jesse Crowder, which he employed for the Filipino action classic *Blind Rage* (see chapter 12) and several other features, all of which were Deuce mainstays. *Death Journey* (1976) is the best of the lot, a surreal Möbius strip of Fred guarding a fat, balding accountant who has ratted on the Mafia. Fred's ex–football player pals play hit men out to kill the accountant in every available train station men's room. Fred is likeable, the fat snitch he's guarding is all too believable, and the movie's repetitive groove really draws you in.

The bizarre bare-knuckled fight movie *Black Streetfighter* (1975) was another film that played on the candy-stained screens of the Roxy after an almost ten-year Deuce absence. The film first opened under the title *Bogard,* was rated a self-imposed X, and at first only played ghetto houses. It had a memorable ad campaign depicting the hero ripping off someone's face.

*Black Streetfighter* is about Leroy (Richard Lawson), a poor Los Angeles guy who gets into the illegal fisticuff's racket through a Jewish mobster who has a huge hook nose and calls him "boy" right to his face. Playing out the dual scales of white antagonism is the Germanic Detective Heniken (Dabney Coleman), who shakes Leroy down. Its grotesque racial subtext—a black man exploited by a Jew and a German—made the movie even more difficult to pigeonhole than it already was. Was it a vice melodrama, blaxploitation, a race-hate or urban martial arts movie, or just a flick about fighters beating the bloody Jesus out of each other on docks and in back alleys, while cheering, beer guzzling crowds look on? While a mess, it was also an entertaining Saturday afternoon guy's adventure movie.

In 1976, Greydon Clark, a white exploitation director who created racially themed movies like *Niggerlover,* made *Black Shampoo,* which appeared on the Deuce with an ad campaign that blatantly played off Warren Beatty's hit movie *Shampoo,* but in a raunchy style reminiscent of such Times Square hardcore staples as *Black Neighbors.* It was a Roxy natural, well remembered by the audience.

John Daniels plays "Mr. Jonathan," an L.A. hairdresser who has bored, horny, moneyed housewives constantly throwing themselves at him. He's capable of throwing a good fuck, but only when he's pressured into it—even with a woman he likes. The role established Daniels's iceman persona, an aloof guy with a world-weary narcissism. Mr. Jonathan hooks up with his foxy soul sister (Tanya Boyd), but she's swept away by a Jerry Lewis–like mobster whose goons destroy Jonathan's beauty shop and then buy him off. The movie ends with a bloody chain-saw battle as Mr. Jonathan rescues Tanya. *Black Shampoo* delivers the exploitation requisites in spades—it's sexy, violent, and funny, even including a lyrical date scene during which a fly walks across the camera lens.

Matt Cimber, onetime husband of Jayne Mansfield, directed some of the original marriage manual movies like *Man and Wife* (1969) and *Africanus Sexualis (Black Is Beautiful)* (1970). He eventually established a niche by exploiting the appeal of black sexual power myths for grindhouse audiences, making *The Black Six* (1974), an action movie starring six black pro-football players; *Lady Cocoa* (1975), a Vegas gangster opus with Lola Falana; and the extraordinary *The Candy Tangerine Man* (1975), which let the Roxy audience vicariously play out the fantasy of being the player who has it all.





As the movie's hero, John Daniels gives an unflappable iceman performance, portraying the Baron, a happily married man who goes on "business trips" each week. He drives away in his nondescript suburban vehicle, but not far from his house switches it for a hidden Bentley and changes into pimp duds. Turns out he's the owner of several successful L.A. whorehouses. He's got things worked out so that he doesn't even have to fuck any of the women who work for him, so that he's able to remain faithful to his wife, whom he digs. Ostensibly he's in business to fulfill his obligations as a provider to his family, but the duplicitous aspect of his double life is a giveaway that he actually finds it compelling to be around vice—though its a dangerous business: Competing gangsters and pimps all want him dead, as do the buffoon cops who constantly pursue him (played by *Love Butcher* director Mikel Angel and *Ilsa*'s Edward "Wolfgang" Roehm).

The Baron trusts black women to oversee his whorehouses, while white women are consigned to being his street bitches. The movie places black women on a higher pedestal than white women, who here provide the focal points for violence. Barbara Bourbon, star of the porno-chic hit *The Private Afternoons of*

*Pamela Mann,* plays a girl who suffers a brutal attack by competitors, and Talie Cochrane plays a hooker whose breasts are cut off by gangsters.

Parts of *The Candy Tangerine Man* are as cartoonish as *Batman,* with the hero gunning down a squad of assassins in slow motion. But it's got its unique sense of humor about itself, too. At one point, the Baron is almost recognized in his pimp mode by his two old lady neighbors. "Is that the man from across the street?" they wonder, as he almost dies of embarrassment.

*The Candy Tangerine Man* let the Deuce audience look narcissistically into its own iris. People at the Roxy also loved its mellow L.A. groove—its expansive settings were always a warm relief for the beleaguered Deuce crowd, who were used to living in cramped-up New York City style. The film may be a calm wish-fulfillment of suburban life, but it's also realistic about the price you pay for living a double life.

Sadly, the reign of the vintage exploitation film ended at the Roxy about a year and half after it started when the theater switched to showing messy late-1980s, filmed-on-video porn. At this point, the grindhouses were closing one by one. The crack epidemic had made 42nd Street less inhabitable and more lethal than ever before. The Roxy continued its 24-hour policy and became a nest of insane *Night of the Living Dead* pipeheads. Unless you were into psycho dinge, there was no reason to pay the admission.

Mrs. Sleazoid remembers the Roxy fondly: "I loved that theater. I miss it. I miss the popcorn man. I missed seeing all the tops of people's heads that had business on the Deuce. You took your life in your hands when you went in that theater. Would you get out alive? Would you be driven to have to use the toilet? Would you freeze or would the A/C be broken? I miss getting lost while looking for what I came for."

# Appendix of Video Companies

**Something Weird Video**
P.O. Box 33664
Seattle, WA 98133
www.somethingweird.com

**Video Holocaust**
Brian Simmons
P.O. Box 10994
Jackson, TN 38305
www.videoholocaust.com

**Video Screams**
P.O. Box443
Bellefontaine, OH 43311
www.videoscreams.com

**Witching Hour Video**
Hayden Milligan
P.O. Box 21744
Lexington, KY 40522
www.witchinghourvideo.com

**Tapes of Terror**
P. Riggs
11430 Mullins Drive
Houston, TX 77035-2632
www.tapesofterror.com

**Video Dungeon**
P.O. Box 873, Dept. SE
Tarpon Springs, FL 34688
www.videodungeon.net

**Shocking Videos**
HC77 Box 111
Hinton, WV 25951
No website; e-mail shockingvideos@citynet.net

**Video Wasteland**
214 Fair Street
Berea, OH 44017-1554
www.videowasteland.com



**Anchor Bay/Blue Underground**
2911 West Olive Avenue
Burbank, CA 91505
www.blue-underground.com



**Grindhouse Releasing**
P.O. Box 931746
Hollywood, CA 90093
No website; e-mail: grndhouse@aol.com

**5 Minutes to Live**
Sam Mcabee
P.O. Box 941956
Atlanta, GA 31141
www.5minutesonline.com

**Cinefear Video**
Keith J. Crocker
P.O. Box 1742
Baldwin, NY 11510
www.cinefear.com

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